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Women in Politics Oral History Project

Clara Shirpser

ONE WOMAN'S ROLE IN DEMOCRATIC PARTY POLITICS:
NATIONAL, CALIFORNIA, AND LOCAL, 1950-1973

In Two Volumes

With an Introduction by
Alan Cranston

An Interview Conducted by
Malca Chall

Copy No. 1

VOLUME I



Clara Shirpser

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This two-volume memoir of Clara Shirpser was produced as the first of a planned oral history project on California Women Political Leaders. At the time the memoir was begun no financing was available for the series, only a draft proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities. To enable the interviews with Clara Shirpser to get underway and to provide funds for an eventual matching grant, donations were sought from Clara's friends and former political colleagues.

On behalf of future scholars, the Office wishes to thank Mrs. Shirpser's many friends and colleagues whose names are listed on the following page, whose contributions have made possible the production of this interview and stimulated the National Endowment for the Humanities to provide the matching grant to develop the comprehensive project on California Women Political Leaders.

Malca Chall, Director
Women in Politics Oral History Project

Willa Baum, Department Head
Regional Oral History Office

30 August 1975
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PREFACE

The following interview is one of a series of tape-recorded memoirs in the California Women Political Leaders Oral History project. This is the second phase of the Women in Politics project, the first of which dealt with the experiences of eleven women who had been leaders or rank-and-file workers in the suffrage movement.

This series of interviews has been designed to study the political activities of a selected group of prominent California women who became active in politics during the years between the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment and the current feminist movement--roughly the years between 1920 and 1960. The women are Republicans, Democrats, independents, and members of splinter parties. A few aspired to public office and were defeated; a few have been elected or appointed; others have worked as political leaders in local offices, convention halls, and along the campaign trails to help elect their candidates to important political positions.

While the experiences of each woman are, of course, unique, as a whole these first-hand observations provide primary source material into the varying backgrounds, attitudes, and insights of women who achieved political prominence in an era when politics, at least at the higher levels, was considered the sole province of men. In addition they provide scholars with valuable historical information on details of party organization and the men and women who served in the party structures at the county, state, and national levels, the processes of selecting party leaders, raising funds, and drafting platforms, and the more subtle aspects of political life such as maintaining harmony, coping with jealousies, geographical dissensions, and fatigue, and the pleasures of friendships, triumphs, and struggles in a common cause.

The California Women Political Leaders Oral History Project has been financed by donations from individuals interested in this project, from friends and colleagues of individual memoirists, and by a matching grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons prominent in the history of the West and the nation. The Office is under the administrative supervision of James D. Hart, Director of The Bancroft Library.

Malca Chall, Director
Women in Politics Oral History Project

Regional Oral History Office
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University of California at Berkeley

Willa Baum, Department Head
Regional Oral History Office

INTRODUCTION

We begin the 199th year of our Republic with a sense that some real progress has been made in securing for women an equal role in the discharge of our nation's political responsibilities. There's still a long way to go before real equality is achieved. But when as diverse a group of Democratic politicians as Yvonne Braithwaite Burke, Elizabeth Holtzman, Barbara Jordan and Bella Abzug can be effective and successful in Congress to the extent that they receive national recognition, we know the surge toward equal rights will not be stopped.

It is difficult for me to conceive that women only achieved the right to vote during my lifetime.

And it's equally difficult to recall how different the world of women was in the California Democratic party of the early 1950s when I just met Clara Shirpser.

The stereotype was ubiquitous. In organizations, women were elected secretary or chosen to head women's activities, which consisted largely of putting on afternoon coffee hours for candidates or their wives. Women's Democratic clubs were given the role of producing hors d'oeuvres for Democratic fundraising cocktail parties. A few women, but only a few, broke out of that stereotype and achieved political power and influence within the California Democratic party of the early '50s.

In those days Democratic activists in California idolized two women who were equal if not superior to the very best male politicians in the party: former Congresswoman Helen Gahagan Douglas, who had been the Democratic Senate candidate in 1950, and Eleanor Roosevelt. These two great women set a standard for excellence in politics, and it was by measuring up to that standard that Clara Shirpser achieved her notable political success.

In 1952, California Democrats hit bottom with a stunning political defeat. After that election Democratic leaders throughout the state were casting about for some way to rebuild the party. It seemed to me and to others that a permanent organization of Democratic clubs operating in tandem with the official party central committees would give us a device for making pre-primary endorsements (which the Republicans had been doing for years) as well as infusing new people and ideas into our moribund party.

Our first task was to organize more clubs.

Clara was the newly elected Democratic National Committeewoman from California and seemed to me an ideal person to help organize a Democratic club in the Palo Alto area where I lived at the time. She accepted my invitation and spoke at our first meeting. Subsequently, she traveled throughout Northern California, speaking before organizing groups. She became an ardent enthusiast of the club movement.

Clara helped convince the late George Miller, Jr., then Democratic State Chairman, of the need for a statewide organization where the clubs and the official party could work under one roof. Together they called the meeting at Asilomar which led to the formation of the California Democratic Council, of which I had the privilege to be elected the first President--with substantial help from Clara.

California Democrats thus began a revival which culminated when we "swept the state in '58."

The formation of the C.D.C. was but one chapter in Clara's long political career. But it illustrated her great strength. Members of the C.D.C. chose to work within the Democratic party with the hope that they could affect the political direction of their state and nation.

Clara fed that hope by the example she set. As the top California woman in the official Democratic party structure, she used her position to work for political goals, some of which were controversial within the party. She led in the successful fight to abolish cross-filing in California. She unhesitatingly spoke out for civil rights legislation, for complete integration in education, housing and jobs. She fought for greater participation by women in policy-making roles both in the party and in government.

Clara brought the heritage of Roosevelt and Douglas into those formation meetings of the C.D.C.

Her own success convinced others that a commitment to improving the social environment of all Americans can be served--and perhaps best served--through active participation in politics.

It's a message even more relevant today than it was two decades ago.

Alan Cranston
United States Senate

15 January 1975
Washington, D.C.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

When Clara Shirpsier learned, in January, 1972, that the Regional Oral History Office was planning an oral history project based on the experiences of women who had been political leaders between 1920 and 1960--the years between passage of the Nineteenth Amendment and the most recent campaigns for equal rights between the sexes--she not only agreed to be the first woman to be interviewed in the upcoming series, but to help in the fund raising for the project.

The donors whose contributions are acknowledged elsewhere in this volume, made it possible to produce this exceptional interview and to establish the Women Political Leaders Oral History Project.

Clara Shirpsier (in her community life always called Clara), has been a political activist since she joined the Berkeley League of Women Voters in 1945. Her race for a seat in the California state assembly in 1950, although unsuccessful, catapulted her to the top levels of state and national Democratic party politics, where, in her capacity as the Democratic National Committee-woman for California, she served from 1952-1956. Although her support of the candidacy of Estes Kefauver rather than Adlai Stevenson during the 1956 primaries led to her displacement, she has continued to serve her community and her party with exceptional vigor and success.

Clara's ten most active years in politics, particularly those four during which she served as national committeewoman, form the bulk of this lengthy two-volume interview. Measured in terms of chronology, a decade does not seem an impressive span of time, but measured in terms of the men and women whose political fortunes were being made and lost and by the important issues which they confronted, this was a significant decade in California and American politics.

Intelligent, principled, strong-willed, energetic, albeit naive about partisan politics, Clara (not one to let others run over her when she thought she was in the right) held her own among the pros and the amateurs, among the passive, the active, and the manipulative in the ranks of the Democratic party.

Tape recording began May 11, 1972, and was completed with the twentieth interview session on July 31, 1973. Each interview took place in the study of Clara's beautifully-appointed six-room garden apartment, atop the three-story building, near the Berkeley campus which she and her husband Adolph built in 1964. There, seated at a card table, with a well-filled scrapbook,

the files of saved correspondence, memoranda, and news clippings lying nearby for ready reference, and surrounded by scores of autographed pictures of political figures, Clara recounted in detail and with feeling, her first-hand experiences as a woman in politics. Although she frequently put this account into a conversational, story-telling form of narrative one is not to assume that she remembered exactly the words of the speaker, only that she has recalled the general content of their statements.

Because this story is told by a perceptive woman, Clara is able to bring out how being a woman may have shaped what she thought, what she did, how she reacted, and what she perceived were the expectations of women in the political arena. But more than that, this is a vivid story of the worst and the best of politics at the local, state, and national levels. With Clara we feel the excitement, the fun, and the fatigue of campaigning in trains, planes, and autos; we become part of the improbable scenes at the national conventions--in the halls, caucuses, and hotel rooms; we share the pleasures, surprises, friendships, and enmities of the political process--from the kiss on the cheek to the knife in the back.

As a national committeewoman, as a close associate and confidante of Estes Kefauver, and as a high official in the presidential campaigns of both Kefauver and Adlai Stevenson, Clara's accounts enable us to gain insight into these leaders as well as into many of the men and women who worked with them as they strove for the nation's top political spot. Many of the skirmishes, mostly behind the scenes, some never before told, are part of this record.

Some of the very important political people of that decade and those who began then but are now VIPs, are here too. In addition to Kefauver and Stevenson we meet Jerome Waldie, Alan Cranston, Jeffrey Cohelan, Phil Burton, Henry Jackson and Edward Roybal, early in their careers and such experienced pros as Harry Truman, Sam Rayburn, Steve Mitchell, Paul Butler, Paul Ziffren, William McCormick Blair, Mike Di Salle, Blair Moody, Howard McGrath, Matt McClosky, George Killion, George Miller, Jr., India Edwards, Elizabeth Snyder, Elinor Heller, and California's then-governor, Edmund G. "Pat" Brown. These and many, many others are here as they vie for position for themselves and others, through their activities in the Democratic Party.

California's politics are not neglected. The North-South feuds, so much a part of Democratic party life in this state, are discussed, as is the founding of the California Council of Democratic Clubs and its first three exciting endorsing conventions.

Clara carefully reviewed the edited transcript of her interviews during the summer and fall of 1974, and proofread the typed copy early in 1975 to insure to the best of her ability the accuracy of the material covered.

Shortly after completing the interviewing, Mrs. Shirpser moved to an apartment on Nob Hill in San Francisco, a difficult change considering that for some fifty years her social and political ties had been largely in the Berkeley community. At the time of her move she donated most of her correspondence, memoranda, pictures, and other memorabilia to The Bancroft Library where it is now available for research. A sampling of this valuable collection is included in the manuscript wherever it fits into the narrative.

This oral history memoir should, as Clara hoped it would when she began to work on it, provide scholars with a significant resource as they pursue their studies about women as well as the various aspects of politics in the United States.

Malca Chall
Interviewer-Editor

30 August 1975
Regional Oral History Office
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Brief Biography

1901	Born, San Francisco, California
1919-21	Student, University of California, Berkeley
1938-1941	Owner-Manager retail business, Berkeley (after death of husband)
1943-1950	League of Women Voters, Board of Directors
1948-1949	League of Women Voters, President
1950	Democratic Nominee for Eighteenth Assembly District
1950-1956	Alameda County Democratic Central Committee
1952-1956	Democratic National Committeewoman for California Democratic State Central Committee, Executive Committee
1952	Delegation, Kefauver presidential primary campaign in California
1953	Organizing Committee, California Council of Democratic Clubs
1956	National Vice-chairman, California Vice-chairman, Kefauver presidential primary campaign
1956	Co-chairman, executive committee, Stevenson-Kefauver presidential campaign
1952, 1956, 1960	Alternate delegate, Democratic National Conventions
1956-1973	President, Herrick Hospital Arch of Amethysts (Rehabilitation Center)
1960	Advisory Committee to Herrick Hospital Board of Trustees
1959-1967	Governor's Advisory Committee to California Consumers Council
1959-1966	Executive Board, American Association for the United Nations (San Francisco)
1959-	Board of Directors, California Heritage Council
1961	Member, National Inauguration Committee (Kennedy)
1961	Delegate, White House Conference on Aging
1964	Chairman, Alameda County Women for Johnson-Humphrey
1962-1968	Board of Directors, University of California Alliance
1967-1969	Board of Directors, Brandeis University, East Bay Committee
1968-1970	Board of Directors, Bay Area Planning Committee
1960-1973	Board of Directors, Planned Parenthood
Listed in:	Who's Who in America, 1953 to present Who's Who of American Women Who's Who in American Politics Who's Who in the West

VOLUME I

I THE FIRST YEARS: EDUCATION AND POLITICS
(Interview 1, May 11, 1972)Parents

- Chall: Can you tell me first where you were born, and the date, if you want to give it away?
- Shirpser: Surely, it was in San Francisco, August 25, 1901. That's an awfully long time ago.
- Chall: Who were your parents?
- Shirpser: My father was Leo Garfinkle (same name as the fine store in Washington, D.C.) but unfortunately we're not related. My mother's name was Alexandra Shragge; everyone called her "Sasha" all her life. They both were born in Russia, but they met in San Francisco.
- Chall: I see, they'd come over at a young age?
- Shirpser: Both in their teens, yes. Both of them had a good deal of hardship in their early lives in the United States. Both worked early and late--went to night school to educate themselves. My father became a merchant.
- Chall: Did he come with his parents, and did your mother come with her parents?
- Shirpser: Yes.
- Chall: Was that as a result of some pogrom activities in Russia?
- Shirpser: Yes, both of my parents are from different areas of Russia. I think they both came to San Francisco at about the same time.

Shirpser: My mother, at about the age of fifteen, in 1894. They met in night school.

Chall: How did they come to San Francisco?

Shirpser: I think my father's parents came through New York. They were very religious people, and my father grew up in this atmosphere that was so rigidly Orthodox, that he became anti-religious toward organized religion, but devoted to traditional values.

They all crossed the ocean with terrible hardship--my mother told me about the people who were crowded into the hold of the ship and how sick people were and what a dreadful passage they had. The voyage took about three weeks. They went to Winnipeg, Canada, first, because my grandfather had a brother there who was quite well-to-do; they stayed there for about two years. Then they decided to come to San Francisco where they had a friend. They had a very hard time at first. My mother and her sisters worked in a factory--worked hard, long hours, and they weren't trained. My grandfather on my mother's side had been quite a wealthy man. The children had gone to private school (called gymnasiums) in Russia, and when my mother came to Canada (I believe she was fifteen years old), she spoke four languages--among them English, fortunately. To continue her education she had to go to night school. I believe she had ten-hour working days in a factory and then went to night school. I often wonder how anyone had the vitality to do all that, but she did.

Chall: I see. What part of Russia? Have you any idea where your grandfather came from?

Shirpser: Yes, my mother was born in Odessa, which is quite an enlightened city, I understand, with museums, and good schools, music, and art and culture. But my father lived in a farming community that had an unpronounceable name like Safamliemikov. It sounded like that. When my mother would get angry at him, she'd say, "Well, what can you expect from a person who comes from Safamliemikov?" I remember that as an often recurring part of my childhood.

Chall: Your mother, had she had the same religious upbringing as your father?

Shirpser: Not nearly so religious. I did go to Sunday school and was confirmed, but I'm not religious either--in the formal sense of the word.

Chall: Let's see, now, if you went to Sunday school, that was--

Shirpser: That was in Sacramento.

Chall: Tell me about how you got there.

Shirpser: My parents moved from San Francisco to Sacramento, where my father managed a retail store. Then he later opened his own store in Sacramento. I went through school in Sacramento. We moved there when I was about eight years old, when Sacramento was quite a small town, and you knew a lot of friendly people. It's a pretty city--a nice place in which to grow up.

Chall: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Shirpser: Only one sister--who is eight years younger than I.

Chall: So, she was born in Sacramento.

Shirpser: Yes.

Chall: What is her name?

Shirpser: Miriam Rosenblum (Mrs. Bert). She lives in San Francisco.

Education in Sacramento

Chall: Now what about the grade schools and high school which you attended in Sacramento?

Shirpser: I went through grade school and I remember having a teacher called "Four O'clock Sweeney" because she never let us out of class until four o'clock; she always found some reason to keep us after school. But she was a good teacher in spite of that. Strange, I haven't thought of her for years.

Chall: And high school then?

Shirpser: Yes, I went to Sacramento High--and I think it was a good school. I remember participating in many activities. I believe I was the first girl who ever won a block "S" for debating.

Chall: Oh, for debating.

Shirpser: Yes, it seems I was good at extemporaneous rebuttal, which stood

Shirpser: me in good stead later, in politics. Then I was editor of our high school magazine; and I was very much interested in music. I studied first with a Mrs. Pritchard, and later with Albert Elkus, who lived in Sacramento. His father was a merchant who owned a large store there. That's where Albert Elkus started his musical career, and he was teaching music in Sacramento.

Chall: What was his instrument--what was your instrument, too?

Shirpser: Piano. Albert Elkus went on to be head of the music department at the University of California, a post he held for many years. He was a brilliant teacher and a great inspiration to me. In fact, he wanted me to study to be a concert pianist. I was admitted to the Saturday Club in Sacramento which has active members and regular members. At fourteen, I played at a recital for the Saturday Club committee and was admitted as an active member. They told me this was a pioneering effort that I was admitted at that age. You have to have six compositions ready to play, and the committee chooses two for you to play for them. I've always loved music, but when I went to college, I had to stop playing because there was no piano where I lived.

Then when I started to play again after I was married at the end of my sophomore year at UC, I played so badly, in terms of what I used to do, that although I had a piano I played only for my own amusement. So, the active part of my participation in music was over, but I still love music and often go to symphony concerts, and operas, and solo performances.

Chall: And in addition to music and debating what were your interests in class? Did you have any special field of interest?

Shirpser: Yes, I think it was English, and history, and journalism. As I said, I was the editor of the high school magazine. Without wanting to sound immodest, I did graduate in three and a half years with straight A's. I played for a dance class, too, to help earn some money for my music lessons with Albert Elkus, whose piano lessons were quite expensive. That kept me busy, because it was extemporaneous music reading, at which I wasn't very good. But I learned to do better.

Cub Reporter

Chall: You were busy. And you were fairly young when you were ready for college, weren't you?

Shirpser: Yes, I was seventeen, and I had six months until the beginning of college. So, somehow or other, I'm not sure how I get there-- I become a cub reporter with the Sacramento Union.

Chall: During the six months?

Shirpser: Yes, during that six months before the actual graduation ceremony. I had finished all the required courses, and I had more than enough credits--so they said I might as well do something else and come back and graduate with the class in June.

This was really a tremendously interesting and productive experience for me, because the editor was Herbert Allen, who had been in Europe with Herbert Hoover, during the food administration project. He was kind and helpful to me. He knew I was only seventeen, completely inexperienced; and he took time to explain what it was all about, and what he expected of me. Instead of giving me just a beat, which I had between feature stories, he sent me to various events that happened in Sacramento, where he wanted the point of view of a naive and inexperienced girl, and I made the front page several times with these news stories.

One of them I especially remember. My father belonged to the Elks Club, and they were going to have a picnic. This was a Sunday; Mr. Allen knew about this event and he told me he wanted me to report the picnic, especially a prize fight which was taking place, with one man called, "Battling Savage."

Being conscientious, I was there early, near the ropes of the prize fight area, and as the crowd gathered, they pushed me forward, forward, until I was leaning against the ropes when the prize fight started. Several times, this man whose teeth were always bared in a horrible grimace (I guess he'd had his mouth injured)--actually bled on me. He was flung into my arms, and I would cringe in horror, and then he would bleed. I couldn't get out, I was trapped by the crowd. I came back to the newspaper office and I wrote about the horrors, the primitive brutality of prize fights. So I made a headline: "Club Reporter Sees her First Prize Fight"--on the front page--and I've never been to a prize fight since then.

Shirpser: One day I was sent to the annual sewing sale at the home for unwed mothers, where there were many young girls. One was only twelve or thirteen years old, I think, and she was pregnant. The girls had done some lovely handiwork which was on sale. I got a lot of their background. Some were quite grim. The home itself was barely adequate. They lived in very tiny cubicles, and I was saddened by the whole situation. It seemed to me the girls were being punished rather than rehabilitated.

Then, there were fun things too. One night the regular reporter couldn't make it, so I was told to "cover" a banquet which was honoring four aviators who had flown across the United States. This was a pioneer flight--no one had ever done it before, I believe. I arrived at the banquet and found I was the only female. They put me at the head table among the aviators and I had a great time. After the banquet the aviators, all attractive young men, asked me to go out with them and "show them Sacramento." I said, if they'd come to the newspaper office first, and let me write my story, and then if they'd come home and meet my folks. (You know I was only seventeen and I knew my parents would have been upset otherwise.) They agreed to do all this. I remember it was a marvelous evening, dancing with all of them and having a wonderful time. I was determined I was going to be a newspaper reporter after that night.

Chall: That was fun.

Shirpser: But Mr. Allen talked me out of it. He thought it was too tough a life for me, with my temperament. I reacted very strongly to injustice and to cruel situations. He thought I would be torn apart. Remember how long ago this was. Mr. Allen thought it would be a life that wouldn't be good for me, though he thought I had some talent for writing. Later when I went to college, I was a reporter for the Daily Cal, too. But that was boring, after having been a reporter on a city newspaper.

Chall: It was a good experience, though.

Shirpser: It was; it was a wonderful experience, and I really felt that I learned a tremendous amount at the Sacramento Union. The other reporters were mostly older men, and they all sort of took me in hand--criticized me, praised me, and gave me a feeling of real identification with the newspaper and what I was trying to do.

Chall: Was there at least one woman covering the social scene?

Shirpser: Yes, there was a society reporter who was a woman. That seemed to be par for the course among newspapers in those days. So, my experience as a cub reporter covering all types of situations was really quite unusual and was certainly very important and beneficial for me.

University of California at Berkeley

Chall: So you were ready then in the fall to go to college?

Shirpser: Yes.

Chall: And you chose Berkeley?

Shirpser: Yes.

Chall: Any special reason?

Shirpser: I had family in San Francisco, for one thing. And it was less expensive to go to a state university. Perhaps, at this point we could bring in the woman's viewpoint.

My mother always had great respect for education and for intelligence, and wanted me to go to college. But my father had the old-fashioned point of view that if I were a boy, he'd "work his fingers to the bone" to send me to college, but since I was a girl, and I would probably go for a limited time and then get married, it would probably just be a waste of time and money. I resented this very much because I did make a good record in high school, and I was tremendously interested in going to college. In fact, it took a broken engagement, which caused me a lot of suffering, before he could see the value of my going to college to get over my "broken heart."

So, I did get to UC. I have always felt it wasn't so much what I learned there, though of course that was extremely important, but it was the training given to my mind. I think that you're so much more ready to go into any new field that develops for you if you have a more disciplined mind, and you're accustomed to concentrating. I would say my two years at Cal... I did fulfill my father's prophecy and get married at the end of two years. [Laughs]

Chall: You didn't finish?

Shirpser: No, at the end of two years, I got married, and proceeded to have a baby nine months and three weeks later. So, I didn't go back to college, though I always hoped I would and planned to do so. Again, without wanting to sound immodest--I did get one C; that was in gym, which I loathed--but I did make a straight record of A's in my other subjects.

Chall: What were you studying?

Shirpser: I took Logic, which I enjoyed very much, under Professor Reber; Philosophy, Psychology, Anthropology, History, English. I didn't like math or science particularly. At that time, in your two first years, you could take elective courses, so I chose the things in which I was most interested. I thought the level of teaching was marvelous. We were much closer to our professors in those days. You know, they had regular times when you could come to talk with your professors and explore whatever questions or problems you had. The seminars were smaller; the section teachers were close to you, too.

I recognize that with the present big classes, they're a challenge, and if you can make good, you can take on almost any form of activity after that. But, there's a lot to be said for smaller schools where you got this fine incentive from your teachers and you had the opportunity to know them, too.

Chall: What year was this?

Shirpser: I was class of '23. I must have been a freshman in 1920.

Chall: I see. Well, the school was small then.

Shirpser: It certainly was far smaller than it is today. I also worked for Professor Kroeber, in anthropology. My years in college were a big expense for my parents, who weren't wealthy. So, I typed for Professor Kroeber to earn money. There were no "Fair Bear" standards then; I think I got forty cents an hour. Mostly I transcribed bird calls and animal sounds, but there was also more interesting work. He was writing a book, and he did entrust parts of the manuscript to me, which he had written by hand. And he had very difficult handwriting to read.

Chall: Did you type it?

Shirpser: Yes. But I could discuss parts of his book with him, which was very interesting for me. When I got stuck, he always found time to talk to me and explain what he was trying to say. Occasionally, he even allowed me to make a suggestion.

Chall: What kind of a person was he?

Shirpser: He was a scholar, chiefly, and a very serious person. He was disappointed when I told him I was getting married. He thought I should have stayed for four years of college and graduate. But he also understood. If you were in love and you wanted to get married, that was all right, too.

I always had a fine relationship with him, and I enjoyed working with him. But you see, between being on the Daily Cal, and working, and my classes, I had very long days.

Chall: Did you know Mrs. Theodora Kroeber at the time you were working for him?

Shirpser: No, I didn't. Professor Kroeber had an assistant, whose name I've forgotten--an older woman who was very kind to me, and helped me with a lot of work I was doing then, and encouraged me.

Chall: You think you might have majored in anthropology if you'd stayed?

Shirpser: I don't know. I think I might have gone on to more journalism and English. Those seemed to be the subjects I enjoyed the most. But I also was very interested in anthropology.

Chall: I see. Well, that took care of your schooling, then.

Shirpser: I don't want to sound like I was just a "grind"--I had a lot of fun and dates. [Laughter]

Chall: Where were you living?

Shirpser: I lived in a house on Regent Street, where there were other girls, and I shared a room with one of them. It was within walking distance of the campus. When I was a freshman, a graduate law student whom I knew through my family was a little worried about some of my dates. So, he used to pick me up at the library every night, about 10:00 p.m. closing time, after he finished at the Law School library and walk me home to Regent Street. He advised me what I should and shouldn't do, and it

Shirpser: was very good for me to have his advice. He was very intelligent, and interested in me, and it was a very nice, platonic relationship.

Chall: Isn't that fine; he took an older brother interest in you.

Shirpser: Yes, that's right, I'd never had an older brother, and often wished I had. He was the nearest thing I ever had to that relationship.

Marriage, Family, and Business

Chall: How did you happen to meet your husband while you were in college? Was he in college too?

Shirpser: No, he opened a store on Telegraph Avenue called Herman's Smart Shop. We had mutual friends who introduced us. He was ten years older than I. From the time we met, he started asking me for dates, more and more frequently. I was enjoying college and didn't want to get married, but he was very persuasive and we fell in love. Less than a year later, we were married.

Chall: What did he sell in Herman's Smart Shop?

Shirpser: It was a men's store. He had come from Southern California, where he had previously lived, and he had been in that business. This was his own first store. He had a very outgoing, likeable personality, and he did very well in the store. In fact, within three or four years, he opened a store that was many times larger. We always had UC football captains, baseball and basketball captains working in the store, and it was a popular meeting and shopping place for students.

We had two children by then, but I had a good housekeeper at home, so, instead of doing more social things and playing golf, I helped in the store, especially during the Depression years. This stood me in good stead later, when my husband died suddenly of a heart attack. He was only forty-six years old; we'd been married seventeen years.

Chall: What was his name?

Shirpser: Herman Rosenberg. Later, we started to get the second generation

- Shirpser: of customers--the sons of boys who had been in college when Herman first started in business. These boys would walk in the store and say, "My father said he'd break my neck if I didn't buy everything from you." This really made them friends as well as customers. We supported all the college activities, of course--to send the band wherever they were going, and to buy tickets for everything. Many of the students we got to know well--helped with their problems, too, outside of business.
- Chall: And did that store remain on Telegraph, even when it expanded?
- Shirpser: Oh yes, we were then eight doors from Sather Gate, where the administration building is now. I kept the store going for about three years after my husband died. I think I was one of the few women in the country to own and manage a men's store. It was an unusual sort of juxtaposition, but my previous background helped me to make a success of managing the store.
- Chall: You knew the business.
- Shirpser: I didn't do it without getting advice. Our main line was Fashion Park clothes, and the head of the firm was a good friend, so he came to Berkeley from the New York headquarters to advise me as to whether he thought I was taking a big risk. His firm was taking a risk, too, because there was quite a large sum owing them. After he talked with me for some time, he decided I knew enough to make it go, and fortunately I did so. I was able to draw a good living out of it. A lot of tragedy happened in that one year in which my husband died.
- Chall: What year was this?
- Shirpser: Thirty-four years ago. Our first tragedy was our younger daughter, who was ten, she had had several appendicitis attacks, the doctor advised an operation, and a month later a blood clot developed, and she died. The shock for Herman and me was unbearable. I have never really stopped grieving for her. The agony and longing for a beloved child are indescribable suffering.
- Chall: In that same year, 1938?
- Shirpser: Yes, that was early in the year, in March. Then, my husband died of a heart attack in December of the same year that Joyce died. He was only forty-six. Then my father was killed in an automobile accident the next year. And he was just sixty. My father's death was a terrible shock for all of us, especially my mother, of course. All of these tragedies left me depressed and ill,

Shirpser: but Bobbie needed me and I tried to make a good life for her.

Chall: Did you bring your mother here?

Shirpser: She already lived in Berkeley. She was independent, but she was insecure. She needed me to help her through that bad period, and she still does thirty-four years later. She's now ninety-four and a really remarkable woman for her age--alert and intelligent, though forgetful and often confused. We have always had a close and devoted relationship.

I was a widow for two years, but I kept the store going for a year after I was married to my second husband, who was a bachelor before we married.

Chall: And his name was--

Shirpser: Adolph Shirpser.

Chall: And was he also in Berkeley in business?

Shirpser: No, he was in San Francisco, and he owned the American Safe Company. He had had training as a vault engineer, representing Diebol Safe Company. Later he became the Mosler Safe Company representative. It was a small business, but he did well, and he was very well-liked by his clients. During the year in which we had dates, it got to be very difficult for him, commuting every night to Berkeley, with the late nights, and working during the day. It just didn't seem sensible, after a while to continue this. We shared many interests and after a year of growing affection we decided to get married. My daughter Bobbie (Barbara) had a beautiful relationship with Ad. I often wondered how a man who'd been a bachelor all his life, and who was attractive (tall and quite handsome), and had had many very likeable women friends before me, settled into domesticity so easily, and to fatherhood, too.

Chall: How old was Barbara?

Shirpser: She must have been about sixteen. She and I lived in the Durant Hotel in an apartment there. So, we were all glad to have a home and resume home life. You see, managing the store as I did, I really needed to be close to the store, so I could come and go at will, and the Durant Hotel was just a block and a half away. We ate out all the time and friends and family were kind about having us over. But it was much better for Bobbie,

Shirpser: too, to have a home rather than living in a hotel.

Chall: So, you set up a home in Berkeley?

Shirpser: Yes, right away. We rented first, then we built.

Chall: I see. And then did your husband always work then in San Francisco?

Shirpser: Yes.

Chall: He just commuted. Daytime was easier than at night!

Shirpser: Indeed it was! He went in the morning after the heavy traffic and came home earlier, usually.

Chall: I remember that you told me that Judah Magnes was a first cousin of your husband.

Shirpser: I didn't know him, but my husband had, and was much influenced by him and his point of view. Judah Magnes, you know, was one of the people who was very anxious to have the Arabs be citizens in Israel with complete equality, and this made him very much disliked in Israel in the beginning. I think, if his viewpoint had prevailed from the beginning, it might have had a good effect and that there wouldn't be such hostility today.

I didn't know him; I've known his sons, or at least I've met them, and his wife, and I regret that I didn't know him. I wish I had, because I admired and respected him.

After I gave up the store, I had a great deal of time to plunge into other activities. I missed the store. I think I had the same problems of retirement that a man has. You know, you don't feel needed; you haven't a place where you must go each day or want to go each day, and a job to do, and a sense of productivity. I missed all that.

Chall: You'd never really been a housewife, had you?

Shirpser: Yes, I was, after I was first married. I like to cook, I like to have a lovely home, I like gardens--flowers are important to me--I like to have friends for dinner, and for lunch. For the first few years of my marriage, I think I led quite a social life--a lot of bridge playing, golf, concerts, plays, and lectures. I always have read a great deal. I like to think I always continued activities that were fairly intellectual, but not nearly as much so then as later, when I had more leisure.

Chall: What did you plunge into then? Let's see, what was the date of your marriage, about 1941?

Shirpser: Yes.

Chall: In 1941, we were involved in a war.

Shirpser: Yes, and it's rather interesting how Ad and I heard about it. You see, we had college students as employees, except for one older man--well, he was still a young man in his forties, managing the store for me. We were taking stock which we did annually, and Ad and I were there, helping Jock, who was our manager, and all the boys were there. Somebody, surreptitiously in the background (we were taking inventory) was listening to the radio, and he came bursting in and said, "I can't believe it, they've bombed Pearl Harbor. I think probably it's only a radio play, but we'd better listen." The tragic news was really true, we learned as we listened to the radio. I looked around that store and saw all those fine young men and I knew what war would mean to them, and it was almost more than I could bear. Two of them were killed in the war, and one of them was in that first wave of flyers that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

Chall: You said you kept the store for about a year after you married the second time.

Shirpser: Yes. Really, the reason I stopped--I wouldn't have, voluntarily, but the University decided to build the administration building right there, and so they took the whole side of Telegraph Avenue where our store was located. To relocate in another store and to find a good location, which was not then available, just seemed too much. So, very reluctantly, we gave up the store, just sold it and retired.

Chall: You retired.

Shirpser: I retired, and the store retired. [Laughter]

Leadership in the League of Women Voters

Chall: And then what did you do?

Shirpser: My activities in the League of Women Voters must have been next. A friend who was in the league urged me to join, and I did. I think that within a year, I was on the board of the League of

Shirpser: Women Voters, and I believe I stayed on the board for eight or nine years.

I certainly recommend the League of Women Voters as a background to active participation in politics. I think if I hadn't had that experience, I might have been overwhelmed when I was so quickly thrust into national politics. Because in the League of Women Voters you really learn not to speak until you know what you're talking about. That sense of responsibility is deeply ingrained in you. You study, and do a great deal of discussion before you come to a consensus at the local, regional, state and national levels. You're in contact with other people who have the same motivation. I think it's a splendid organization.

The one criticism I might have of it is that, depending on who is president, what the leadership is on the board of directors, that they're sometimes afraid of action, because it'll be considered partisan. The league position is based on issues after study. But I have found, and I'll speak of it later, that there have been times when they've really been too timid about taking action when it would have been a good thing for the league if they had taken a position. I mean, chiefly at the local level as it concerned me. The nonpartisan stand of the League of Women Voters is firmly established, and I agree wholeheartedly to its importance.

There are some liberal leagues and there are more conservative leagues. The Berkeley league usually was a liberal one; the one in San Francisco was quite conservative. You found this to be true when you went to the state conventions and heard the different points of view exemplified.

But, all in all, I think the league serves a fine purpose, and I wish more women belonged to it, because they could be so much more effective if they spoke for many thousands, rather than a few hundred, which is often true locally.

Chall: Well, that would certainly fill your time, if you went from membership to the board, which evidently you did rather quickly, didn't you?

Shirpser: Yes.

Berkeley City Council Reform

Shirpsen: Then I became local government chairman. Now, this was a job not many women wanted, because it meant being at council meetings--oh, I'm guessing, but I would think, perhaps, at eight o'clock in the morning--certainly not later than 9:00 a.m.

Chall: Really?

Shirpsen: Yes, I think that there was a purpose to this--to minimize citizen attendance and participation. I remember getting up at the crack of dawn to get there on time. Prior to the meeting of the city council, the council members would meet together, and they would discuss what they were going to do, and they evidently arrived at unanimous conclusions, yes or no. The agenda was never publicized; you could not find out what they were going to discuss at the meeting. Mayor Fitch Robertson was also the chairman of the council. He would march in with the council members and sit down, and he would say, "Resolution 1234 is before us; all those in favor say 'Aye,' contrary, 'no'--passed unanimously."

I'd sit in the audience with those of us who cared enough to be there, or who had a reason to be there, and we wouldn't even know what they were voting on. If you raised your hand to ask, before they voted, Mayor Robertson would inform you, "You can speak at the end of the meeting." Well, obviously you couldn't influence their thinking if you didn't know on what they were voting. You couldn't do anything more than protest, probably, at the end of the meeting. This is the way it went on week after week, and it was one of the most frustrating experiences I have ever had!

Do you want me to go on with this local government chairmanship?

Chall: Yes, but before we get deeply into your league activities, could you tell me about other groups in which you were active?

Shirpsen: I think those were mostly memberships--I belonged to quite a few philanthropic groups. For instance, I was on the board of the California Alliance. That had to do with scholarships at UC; we raised funds, and we lent money, chiefly to students who couldn't have come to college otherwise, and then they would pay

Shirpsen: us back, without interest, at the time they could. If they needed an outright grant, we often were able to find the money. I was on the board of the United Nations Organization, the California Heritage Council. I belonged to the YWCA, the Berkeley Women City Club, and many other groups, including the American Civil Liberties Union.

Chall: Was that about this time--the forties?

Shirpsen: Yes, I think so. I didn't go into the Herrick Hospital Guild, which became one of my most absorbing interests, until after I was national committeewoman. I belonged to quite a few organizations, most of which had to do either with the University or philanthropic groups, or women's groups. I wasn't active in some of them, but I just paid dues.

Chall: All right, let's continue our discussion about the League of Women Voters.

Shirpsen: Well this really launched me into my political career. To get back then to the city council. They were mostly businessmen. Mr. Robertson--I don't want to sound too critical here--but it seemed to be common knowledge that Mayor Robertson was close to Mr. Hink, and generally supported his interests while being mayor of Berkeley.

Chall: That's the Hink's Department Store?

Shirpsen: Yes. Mayor Robertson belonged to the Elks Club, I was told, and I never heard it denied, that he had lunch there almost every day, and played bridge many afternoons. So, he didn't have an active business or professional career. How he lived, in terms of earning income, I don't know.

But this Berkeley city council certainly was business-oriented in those days, and quite closed, as far as citizen participation went.

Berkeley had an excellent city manager named Gerritt Van der Ende. He had a continuing struggle with the council, because he was much more progressive, and much more broadly-oriented in his thinking of what good city government should be. While the battle didn't always take place in public, I'm sure that there was much dissension. When he was offered the opportunity to go to a large eastern city at an advance in salary, he resigned. This was very sad for the city of Berkeley, because he was a

Shirpser: most capable and fine person.

The day after he resigned, the city council announced they were appointing Mayor Fitch Robertson to the office of city manager. There is a model city charter which is basic to good city government. It specifically states that no one should be appointed from an elective office, which was the mayor's, to an appointive office, which was the city manager's, without a year elapsing between. Also, it recommends strongly that there be advertising for the post, that many interviews be conducted, and that the appointment should be made on the basis of experience, education, qualifications, and so forth. All of these things were completely flouted by the city council. The very next day, after Mr. Van der Ende resigned, they immediately appointed the mayor to the post of city manager.

Incidentally, what came out later, too, and was probably one of the bases of the district appellate court's decision, was the fact that Mayor Robertson voted for an increase in salary, of the city manager, on two or three occasions. Now, there was no bad motive there; the salary needed to be raised. But the fact that he had done so, also invalidated that he immediately be put into the position where he'd get the increase.

The League of Women Voters board called an emergency session, and of course we were all up in arms. We had the model city charter; we studied the provisions. So, as local government chairman, I was in the forefront of all this. I called Frank Newman, who was a professor of law at the University of California.

Chall: Did you know him?

Shirpser: I knew him quite well, and his wife, Frannie; we've always been good friends. I said, "I've got to talk to you right away; I'm in a terrible spot." So he met with me, and then he spent that whole weekend in the law library, checking on public interest cases, which applied to this, and he gave us his legal opinion. We presented it to the board of the League of Women Voters, who, fearfully, and after much soul-searching, decided to protest Mayor Robertson's appointment as city manager.

The whole city government ground to a halt. Redmond [Bud] Staats (now a judge) was the attorney for the insurance company. Once we protested the appointment as being illegal, as well as unethical, he stopped insuring all salaries. There were no financial transactions from that day, until we met at the district

Shirpser: appellate court; they rushed the case forward. Judge Raymond Peters was the presiding judge at that time. He had a great influence on my life, and I later told him so. He was a splendid person, as well as judge.

The court asked the league to be amicus curiae, and those of us who'd been active in the committee who'd been working on this, wanted to do so, but the board was terrified of the implications, and they refused to go along with that. We missed a wonderful chance to have had a real impact at that trial, because we would have been called on, we would have announced the basis of opposition to the appointment. The court's decision declaring the appointment of Fitch Robertson invalid proved the validity of our position.

I was having to debate before the city council sessions, representing the league, against Gardner Johnson, no less. He called me a meddling woman who was trying to wreck the city of Berkeley.

Chall: What was Gardner Johnson's position then?

Shirpser: He was an attorney. He had been an assemblyman, and perhaps a state senator too, and he may have been on the council too, I've forgotten. He was eloquent, and forceful, and experienced. I was nervous but steadfast in upholding the principles at issue. This was a very difficult situation, where the city council was furious at the league and at me--I think the city employees were back of us, but they also were upset--it was a real sacrifice to them to have paychecks delayed. The city was in a turmoil, but the fact that it was a unanimous decision of the court, that this was an invalid appointment, turned us from meddling women into wise ones, for a little while. We did get through new charter amendments, and cleaned up the whole situation.

Chall: I want to back up a bit and ask you a few questions. I note that you discuss the model city charter, and your basis for going to court was really the model city charter and--

Shirpser: And the public interest.

Chall: The previous local government chairmen, who were council observers had, I'm assuming, simply accepted in some way the kind of business which the council ran, and didn't make too much of an objection about it before the league? What I'm really getting at--had the league made any kind of study about

Chall: the method by which this city government was operating? Did it have a study and a stand?

Shirpser: We did that chiefly during the time when I was local government chairman. I know that we had protested in the past and deplored the fact that you could not find out what they were voting on, and that the votes were almost always unanimous with no discussion!

Chall: Since you had a good city manager, was he able to tell you at any time, either before or after, what was coming up? What resolution 1234 meant?

Shirpser: I think he would have very much liked to help us, but he was having so much trouble with the city council, I don't think he dared add one more "nail to the coffin." We did have some off-the-record talks with him, but we didn't feel free to quote him. Also, there usually was someone from the University on the city council to protect the University's interests.

We spoke of public interest. Of course, there's a large volume of research and of decisions that were made along these lines. Other cities have had similar problems, so Frank Newman was able to give us a tremendous amount of information, which was, of course, used by the district appellate court, too.

Chall: Did the Berkeley city charter have anything in it pertaining to this?

Shirpser: I haven't read it for many years. It was often vague, and did not state the principle items of the model city charter. It does, now!

Chall: But nothing with respect to the appointment of a city manager; it wasn't based at all on the model city charter?

Shirpser: I believe this wasn't clearly spelled out. The city council members knew they wanted Fitch Robertson, and they went ahead and made the appointment.

After the court's decision the league appointed a committee and we came up with several charter amendments and revisions, which started Berkeley on the way to democratic council sessions, and helped to get much better people elected, too. Among the things that we recommended was publication of the agenda before the council meeting. Now that's in the Berkeley Gazette every

Shirpser: night before council meetings. We spoke for the right of people to enter into the discussion, after the council had discussed to the extent they wanted and not have to wait until the end of the meeting. A microphone was installed so they could hear you, too, and before the vote was taken we had the right to speak. The meeting time was changed to the evenings at regular intervals when citizens could come, instead of eight o'clock in the morning, when practically everybody was working, or busy with their households.

So, I think we did open up the council meetings and provided for citizen participation. Now, sometimes there's too much discussion probably. But, it's certainly far better than to have the closed sessions. No secret meetings are allowed. The Brown bill in the legislature cancelled secret meetings of public bodies. I believe they can only privately talk on personnel matters.

I believe that it was at this point, when I was so beset with upholding the league's point of view, that Laurence Cross got into the picture. He was a minister, and he headed one of the largest congregations, the Northbrae Community Church. It was interdenominational. He was a very intelligent, forthright, and liberal person. He phoned me; we were trying to rally community support behind us, obviously. You're out there at the end of a limb all by yourself, and it was very difficult to get the support of other community leaders; we had quite a few women who were willing, but very few businessmen, or prominent professional men. They just did not want to get involved!

Chall: Now is this on the court case?

Shirpser: Yes, when we were protesting this appointment. We wanted to get a wide cross-section of citizens who were concerned and who would support us in our stand.

Also Cross called me to praise me for the job I was doing. Remember, I was down there day after day, battling with Gardner Johnson in council meetings. In fact, I said to Ad one day, "You know, this is costing me a lot of money. I have sat there perspiring so copiously from terror and from nervousness, that I'm going to throw away every dress I've ever worn to these sessions. They're all ruined."

I survived it somehow, and when Larry Cross called, he said, "I want to praise you for what you're doing. I know it takes a lot of courage. Stay with it, and you'll see, you'll

Shirpser: win." I asked, "Could we have your name as one of our supporters?" And he said, "Well, it puts me in an awfully difficult position, because, you know, I am the minister of this congregation and chairman of the Red Cross. They may not approve of my stand, and it may make it very difficult for me."

I said, "Well, this is the reaction I get from many, many kind and prominent citizens who call me and urge me to continue this protest. I usually come from the phone after they've said, no, they can't publicly support us, much as they'd like to. I say to my husband, 'Well, anyway, they're back of me.' And he says, 'Yes, but they're awfully far back of you where it's safe.'"

I said this to Dr. Cross, and he said, "I don't blame you for saying that, Mrs. Shirpser, but I just don't see how I can do it." I said, "I understand your position. Thank you for calling me." We ended on an amiable note.

About eight o'clock the next morning, my phone rang, and there was Larry Cross. And he said, "I haven't slept all night. You are absolutely right. If I believe what you're doing is right, I've got to support it. You can use my name as a sponsor." Since he had a large and influential congregation, this helped us very much in getting other sponsors. So, I've always been most grateful to him. It encouraged me and gave me a feeling of security to have one of the best-known people in Berkeley willing to stand up and be counted when it was so difficult.

Chall: He was later mayor of Berkeley, wasn't he, and he was being considered by you, and maybe a few other of your friends, for a while, as a potential candidate for governor.

Shirpser: He wanted very much to be governor, but I didn't encourage him to make that race, nor did many of his real friends. I would have supported him if he'd run, because he was a fine and capable person. He was an eloquent speaker; he was completely sincere. But I didn't think he could possibly win. I really thought I was speaking in his best interests when I discouraged him. His congregation didn't want him to run for governor either, and he might have jeopardized his livelihood.

But he was an excellent mayor, and I think I was of help to him in winning that race. I certainly worked hard in his campaign, and I remembered that he had true courage. He was the first prominent Berkeleyan to support the league in our stand. This brought him a lot of support later in his race for mayor. Of course, he was extremely well known.

Shirpser: He had an awfully tough time as mayor. Lots of people thought a minister was demeaning his calling to be in politics. I think it's one of the best things he could have done, to try lead his city to develop a better government and to get his principles, his integrity, and his sincerity in the forefront of city government. A great deal of good was done while he was mayor, including the appointment of an excellent new city manager, Ross Miller, who, in my opinion, was one of the best in the country.

Chall: Did he follow Fitch Robertson as mayor?

Shirpser: Lawrence Cross followed Mr. Robertson as mayor. The city council then did advertise, and did conduct interviews, and did consider qualifications, and they appointed Ross Miller, who was highly qualified to be city manager.

Chall: At that time it was just right for a person of his principles to run for mayor. Was there a kind of reform movement--reform slate?

Shirpser: Yes. He brought in some good people with him as members of the city council. When you do elect a good mayor, you encourage good city council candidates too.

Then more women started to run for the city council which was valuable, I think.

Later I was appointed by the mayor and the city council to several committees. Mayor Cross appointed me to a citizen's taxation committee, which came up with some excellent recommendations. Again, that was broadly based: we had the manager of the Federal Reserve Bank in Berkeley; we had businessmen, attorneys, and representatives of many organizations. We came up with many unanimous recommendations, which wasn't easy. And there Ross Miller was invaluable. He got us so much background material, and we recommended changes in the business license tax, which eventually went in, but several stronger provisions we had suggested were deleted. We brought in many new ideas, and we studied for at least six or seven months before making recommendations. Most of our report was pigeon-holed and never came to fruition either, but still that was a good committee, and we did accomplish some good results.

Then I was appointed to the Franchise Committee. Mr. Beckley, the chairman, was a member of the city council, and was an executive with Cutter's lab. I don't remember that

Shirpser: committee being particularly productive. I served on a city charter revision committee, too.

Chall: These committee assignments were undertaken over a period of time?

Shirpser: You see, after I was local government chairman of the league, I was president, then candidates' meeting chairman, and local town meeting chairman. So, I think it would have been in the period, during my presidency and afterwards. Perhaps the most important one was the charter revision committee, where we really accomplished many reforms.

Chall: The charter revision committee--was that a city-appointed committee--or was that a league committee?

Shirpser: No, it was city-appointed.

Chall: You were the chairman?

Sharpser: No, I was a member. Somebody suggested that I be chairman but I thought it would be much better for someone who hadn't taken such a controversial role. [Laughs] I was a member, though, and I brought a whole lot of league recommendations, not just my own. Most of them were accepted. That's when we really cleaned up procedures and the charter.

It had to be passed by the city council first, and then voted on by the voters. One of the main features is that now our city charter says that no one can be appointed from the mayor's office to the city manager's unless a year has elapsed. That was quite a big hurdle to get over, because it had never been in there before, and the voters accepted it by a big majority.

This was a period of education. Many people took an interest in their city council who never had before, because then it seemed hopeless. You just attended their meetings and came away angry and frustrated. Now a lot of people think council meetings are too open and too long. But a good chairman can control a meeting. You don't have to let it get out of hand. You just simply keep pounding with the gavel if they're being abusive, and insulting, and monopolizing the meeting. I think you have to learn to be firm and fair as a chairman, and if you are, you can have a good meeting.

Chall: In conducting meetings of this kind where you think there might be some problems, was it a practice of yours to think through what a meeting might be like before you went?

Shirpser: And worry about it? Yes, indeed!

Chall: And not be too surprised by what happened if you'd prepared for it.

Shirpser: Yes, surely. And I always tried to urge people on both sides of the question to attend. Many times the zoning problems have gotten out of hand. They've gotten bitter and controversial. A group will come week after week, insulting the council and saying derogatory things, which really hurts their cause. Sometimes I'd try to talk to the chairman of the protesting group and explain to him that if you want to accomplish something, being insulting doesn't get your project accepted, but positive evidence might. On the other hand, persistence once did help the West Berkeley area in a very important zoning decision. They came week after week, and they testified with factual reasons, and in the end (I thought it was hopeless in the beginning) they finally got their point across with a favorable vote from the city council.

So I think citizens' participation can be extremely productive if they have the patience, and they handle themselves with some courtesy and with effective facts.

After we won the court decision we not only changed the charter provisions and the council procedures, but we did sponsor some legislation.

Chall: State legislation?

Shirpser: Yes, as it applied to cities. We did get some favorable response and other cities joined us. Berkeley really became one of the pioneering cities, with the League of California Cities giving us help. I was given a commendation citation by the National League of Cities. We changed a lot of procedures, and city charters all over the state followed our example.

Another good result was a high increase of voluntary league membership, and increased prestige and effectiveness for the Berkeley League of Women Voters. Then we started an annual Open House at City Hall. You know, people come into the City Hall, and they haven't the faintest idea where they should go or

Shirpsers: what it's all about. We got the different departments to set up exhibits such as the Taxation Department, and the Zoning Department. We furnished very simple refreshments--punch and cookies. I thought, since Berkeley was so business-oriented at that point, and the Junior Chamber of Commerce had been very helpful to me during this fight, I asked them to co-sponsor it with us. They got all these younger businessmen who weren't so hide-bound, and we did have Open House that year and the following years. I don't know whether it's still going on or not; I haven't heard of it lately, so maybe it's been dropped. But we had hundreds and hundreds of people come to the City Hall on that day. We had tour guides, mostly League of Women Voters, or Junior Chamber members, who took them through, and the heads of departments were in their departments to answer questions. Then people came to the council chamber, where they had a small--typical--session. It really served a very useful purpose of getting people to know their city government and getting to know the City Hall, so I thought that was a good accomplishment.

Chall: This was a one-day a year?

Shirpsers: Yes.

Chall: You were still local government chairman when you put this through, too?

Shirpsers: Yes.

Chall: How long were you local government chairman--a couple of years?

Shirpsers: I think it was two years. Then the nominating committee asked me to be president of the league, and I assume this was 1948. We had a very active board of directors and the president has the opportunity to recommend people to be on the board in the various posts. I'm also rather proud that this was the first League of Women Voters' board that had a Negro member, whom I proposed.

Chall: And who was she?

Shirpsers: Mrs. Tom Berkley, whose husband was a leading attorney. Though the league has stood for civil rights, the board was all Caucasian. I put this before the board saying, "I'm not recommending Mrs. Berkley just because she is a Negro. She's a qualified woman with experience. She'll bring a different point of view which we need and which will be valuable." The board unanimously voted for her to become a board member.

Chall: She was of course a member of the league. Were there many black women who were members?

Shirpsen: Only a few in those days. Now there are many. I think this set an example for other leagues too. Either they hadn't thought of it, or it wasn't particularly congenial at that point. I'm very glad it happened at my instigation while I was president.

After I'd been president for several months (I did a good deal of reading, I always have; I love to read) I saw a poll, which really shocked me, and later Adlai Stevenson mentioned this poll as one of the reasons he ran for president. I was so pleased that in my own small way I was thinking along the line he was. In this poll, people were asked about politics and their opinions were very derogatory. The crux of it that disturbed me so much was seven out of ten parents would not want their sons to go into politics. I'm confident that even now they wouldn't want their daughters to go into politics, if only three out of ten were favorable to their sons going into political office.

"Politics, the People's Business"

Shirpsen: This seemed to me really dangerous to democracy, and I kept thinking, "What can I do about it?" I finally dreamed up the title, "Politics, the People's Business," and went to the University of California, where I knew the chancellor, Monroe Deutsch, whom I deeply loved and admired. He said, "Talk to Professor Edward Strong, who's head of the Extension Division. I'll recommend it."

So we got the institute started, co-sponsored by the UC Extension Division and the Berkeley League of Women Voters. I think it was one of the most broadly based institutes I've ever known. We worked very hard and had as participants--students, professors, legislators, businessmen, doctors, attorneys, organized labor representatives, women's groups, men's groups, minority group representatives, philanthropic groups, and farmer's groups. This covered all of Northern California for anybody who wanted to come. I asked Ruth Kingman to be chairman of the institute, with board approval.

We filled Wheeler Auditorium and our speaker, who had just come to Berkeley, and who did a tremendous job for us was Peter

Shirpser: Odegard. He was a professor of political science then, and had just come to UC from the presidency of Reed College. He'd had a broad background in government too, and he's one of the most brilliant and likeable speakers I've ever known--fine sense of humor, too. This was his "maiden" speech in Berkeley. He really got the institute off to a wonderful start.

This was my plunge into politics, although I didn't know it then! I made the welcoming address, and I mentioned this poll on politics to which I referred previously, and I urged everyone there to stop standing on the sidelines and criticizing and to end this derogatory implication of politics. If they didn't like their legislators, they had to be willing to be a rallying point for their friends and neighbors, and to run for office, whether they won or not; that you had to actively participate in politics to make it better; that was the only way democracy could succeed. That was the main thrust of my speech. I really believe every word that I said.

Then we broke into many small groups for discussion of various topics of interest in the subject of "Politics, the People's Business," and then came back to the main session where the different committee leaders reported and made recommendations. From their comments, we thought it had been a fine day and we'd accomplished a good deal.

Chall: This was a one day--

Shirpser: A one-day institute, yes. We all had lunch together in the campus cafeteria. I look back on it with a great feeling of satisfaction.

Chall: The league board and the league membership backed you all the way?

Shirpser: Oh yes--all the way. We had to raise some funds, and we were able to do that. We charged a very small fee, and of course, the University donated Wheeler Auditorium. We each paid for our own lunches. The speakers came from their various areas at their own expense. We broke even, or perhaps had a little deficit, but it was considered the best thing that the Berkeley league had done in years, and everyone was very enthused about the results.

After I finished my term as president, I did not want a second term, because we had for years planned to go to Europe and this year we finally could go. There had always been a reason

Shirpser: why we couldn't, so this time we did go to Europe, and we had a wonderful trip. The board asked me to take a new role when I returned: to be chairman of a series of Town Meetings on current issues--usually once a month.

I started the candidates' meetings too. At that point we had a good relationship with the city council. A lot of new and more liberal people had been elected, and we had succeeded in what we had started to do. So, I asked the city council to use the council chamber in the City Hall for these Town Meetings. There was some heated discussion with council members who were opposed to the league's use of the council chambers for Town Meetings. We were going to bring up current subjects of interest, sometimes controversial, and have speakers on both sides, and make it complete and fair, and non-partisan. Why shouldn't we be able to use the city council's chambers?

Chall: For what purposes?

Shirpser: For candidates' meetings and for the Town Meetings.

Chall: These were to line up the candidates who were running for office and hear their--

Shirpser: Yes. For city council, for the state assembly, for the Board of Supervisors of Alameda County, for state senate, for congressional districts--we invited every person who was a candidate and if they didn't come or didn't answer us, there had to be a valid reason. I was chairman, and I would announce that they were invited and that they hadn't sent a representative, and the audience could draw their own conclusions.

So, they came. [Laughter] I did that once or twice, and then they came.

First, I was candidates' meeting chairman; that was only once a year. And that led into another project that we called, Town Meeting. We had a committee of course, and we chose the subject, and I worked very hard to keep it completely fair and impartial. We presented pros and cons on any issue we believed was important, from government, to civil rights, to nonpartisan politics. We usually had three speakers on each side and then a question period. And the question period sometimes got pretty heated, and I learned to be quite firm as chairman. There were questions from the audience. Long-winded speeches disguised as

Shirpser: questions were not permitted. The person on the panel who answered was limited to two minutes. I really kept very close track of timing because, otherwise the meetings could get taken over, particularly when you had a controversial subject. The audience grew to be so large at times that we moved over to the Berkeley High School Theater, where there was a larger meeting place. I thought these meetings served a very useful purpose, which was confirmed by many phone calls and letters.

Chall: Were these patterned after the Town Meetings of the Air that were popular about that time?

Shirpser: Yes. I'm sure we got ideas from them, but I think we worked out our own agenda. Each candidate for the legislature got a longer period than candidates for the city council. I don't believe anybody ever got more than ten minutes. I haven't thought of this for years--but one candidate got up when his time to speak came and he recited the poem "Trees." "I think that I shall never see..." etc., and he stood there reciting "Trees," and I tried not to giggle. Everybody in the audience was laughing and making faces at me. He was entitled to his five minutes. If he wanted to recite, "Trees," that was his prerogative. I had a handkerchief up to my face most of the time, I must admit.

The Move Into Partisan Politics

Chall: That's a very unusual speech for a candidate.

Shirpser: Yes, it was! Obviously, he lost the election.

The Town Meeting program was something I really enjoyed doing, and while I was Town Meeting chairman, Frank Newman called me one day, and he said, "I'd like to bring some students over who want to talk to you." I said, "Fine," because I really like young people. You know, with my background in the store, I was always surrounded by young people, and Bobbie's beaux were always around; I really enjoyed being with them.

About ten young people came with Frank. Ad was there too. I welcomed them. I was surprised but glad to see with them Jack Tolan. He was campaign chairman of Lyle Cook, who was running for Congress then. Jack is a good friend and neighbor, but I didn't know why he was there. Several active Democrats, more mature, were there, too.

Shirpser: Their spokesman announced: "We've come to offer you our support for the state assembly race in the Eighteenth Assembly District." I looked at them and said, "You have to be kidding!" They announced, "We're not." So, I said, "Well, you know I've never been in partisan politics. All my work with the league had been nonpartisan; I've always been a Democrat, and I've always voted; I've always been interested in politics, and I've contributed to political campaigns, but I've never actively participated. How could I possibly run for the assembly?"

So they pulled out notebooks with notes taken at the U.C. institute on "Politics, the People's Business" and said, "Didn't you say--quote--'if your friends and neighbors need someone around whom to rally, you should stand for office, even if you can't win?'" I said, "Do you know the Eighteenth Assembly District has never elected a Democrat in history? Look what you're asking me to do. I don't have any organization; I don't have any funds, or political experience. I can't possibly do it!" Well, they kept on reading quotes back to me and offering me their earnest support, saying that they had a hundred volunteers lined up. They had all kinds of plans made, and they needed and wanted me as their candidate.

Then Jack Tolan said, "It would help Lyle Cook's campaign if you ran for the assembly when he is running for Congress," and we could join our campaigns and benefit both of us. Then I said, "But you're asking me to run against Tom Caldecott. He's been in the assembly for years. He's conservative, but he's had a good record." His father was mayor of Berkeley, and was chairman of the Board of Supervisors of Alameda County. "They'll both be running against me, because it isn't senior and junior. They have different middle initials. It's not possible that I could ever make a good race. I can't do it."

They said, "We thought you were sincere. We believed in you."

I asked Ad: "What should I do? Look how this race could disrupt our lives." He said, "It seems to me you've obligated yourself to some extent by what you said at the league's U.C. institute, if you meant what you said." So I didn't even get any help from Ad! Then I said, "Look, I'll make a bargain with you. Will you do your utmost to find someone else to run? I'll help your candidate to the utmost. I'll wait till the very last minute, and if you can't find anyone, then I'll do it, although I do it with the greatest reluctance. You realize,

Shirpser: I have to resign from the board of the league, where I think I am contributing something of value. I would have to resign as Town Meeting chairman, and this program is really just beginning to mean something to our community. I've put my mind and heart into it, and I hate to give it up. But I did mean what I said in that speech--I am sincere. But, please, will you try?" They promised that they would try to find another candidate.

As you guessed, an hour before the filing closed, I did file as a candidate for the state assembly in the Eighteenth District, without organization, without money, without a headquarters.

Chall: Many women get their start in the League of Women Voters?

Shirpser: Bernice May did. She had been state president of the league and an excellent president. I think there's no better school for politics than the league. Once you have served your apprenticeship in the league, if you get into active politics, you can bring what you've learned into the partisan field.

Chall: Did you make lasting friendships, as well as training your mind and learning the issues? Did the league help you to make important friendships?

Shirpser: Oh, yes indeed. Really, some of the most wonderful women it's been my privilege to know come through my league contacts. I had so much loyal devotion from them. I tried to do my best, not only because people expect it of you, but because they believe in you, and you can't do less than your best, whatever your limitations are.

Chall: What was it like to take the plunge into politics, into party politics, and the kind of ruthless party politics you got into, with the training in nonpartisanship?

Shirpser: It was difficult. I'm a rather sensitive person. I've never been able to develop a tough hide, though I wish I could have done so. When people are unfair, it hurts. If I did something wrong, I was glad to be told about it, and tried to do better; but to be criticized because you're a woman, or because they disagreed with what you were trying to do, and tried to bypass you; and expected you to fulfill the responsibilities of an office without the prerogatives that went with it, that always outraged me, and I fought.

Chall: You weren't prepared for that.

Shirpser: I wasn't prepared at all for that.

Chall: The league doesn't work that way.

Shirpser: I was somewhat critical of the Berkeley league because when I was a candidate for the state assembly, the League of Women Voters did not have a candidates' meeting because they were afraid they would be considered too partial to me. This was so shocking that quite a few people resigned. The president said, "If I ask people to come to a candidates' meeting under the sponsorship of the League of Women Voters, none of the Republicans will come, and this will harm the league. This narrow point of view meant that for the first time in the years since I had started the candidates' meeting, the league cancelled the meeting because I was a candidate.

I'd had a letter from Mrs. Lee, who was the national chairman of the League of Women Voters, when she heard I was running for office, saying that this is the best thing the league could do--to train capable people in league principles and with a background of study and information on the issues--and then have them go into active participation in politics. She said, "I'm delighted you're running. I wish you every success." In fact she sent me a small check for my campaign.

When this local situation developed (cancelling that candidates' meeting), I wrote to her, and she answered, "I disapprove of their action. Bring it up at the regional convention, which will be in Berkeley soon." So, I did, at an appropriate time in the regional meeting, explaining what had happened. I told her the background; that if a candidate didn't come to our candidates' meeting when I was chairman, I would announce from the platform that I had not received any communication. "Since this candidate didn't come, you must draw your own conclusions, because he obviously doesn't want to tell you what he stands for." I said, "I would like your opinion, Mrs. Lee, as to whether the league should have abandoned a traditional program that had been valuable in the past?"

Mrs. Lee spoke strongly, saying, "I want to tell your president," (who had jumped up and started to protest; it was Mrs. Prescott.) "if the league comes to the point where we can let one party dictate to us what we will do and what we will not do, we have lost one of the most important prerogatives of

Shirpsen: the League of Women Voters. If you have had candidates' meetings for several years, you should have gone on with your candidates' meetings. I feel sure the Republican candidates would have come. I feel sure that the chairman would have been fair and impartial, and I think you did a very harmful thing in abandoning the candidates' meetings."

It wasn't just self-interest that made us protest the cancellation of candidates' meeting. It was that the league was becoming too fearful. You can't live on "cloud nine"; you've got to stand for what you believe in. The league did continue the candidates' meetings the next year, and they still do have them. But to drop them, because I had been president of the League of Women Voters, to thus deny all candidates for the council, the legislature, the supervisors the chance to attend a candidates' meeting, was very timid and unfair--completely out of the realm of the league's values.

Chall: It might also have been used by the opposition as an admission of partisanship towards your campaign.

Shirpsen: That's right.

Chall: --which does happen, particularly if a prominent league board member gives up her position to run for partisan office. People just assume that the whole league is behind her, when this just isn't necessarily so. From the standpoint of the organization backing the candidate, it isn't so at all.

Shirpsen: The other side is that it might be thought that members of the league were not supporting me, and that's why they didn't want to have the meeting. This wasn't true, because, while board members never took a public position, one of my biggest areas of support did come from members of the League of Women Voters--you know, mailing pieces, and precinct work, and telephone committees and all sorts of things to help my campaign. As a member, you certainly can be partisan, and should be. A board member can't take a public position, but the members can, and do.

Chall: She can't do anything in campaign even privately, a board member, except vote.

Shirpsen: Well, yes she can; she can speak to her friends! And she can contribute funds.

Chall: She wouldn't work in your office.

Shirpser: Oh no. And she wouldn't have a coffee hour in her home, inviting neighbors, which was one of the productive things I did all over town--four, five, or six meetings a day. No, the league's board must be nonpartisan. I'm thoroughly convinced that this is valuable.

Chall: So, up to the very last, then, you stood for your principles.

Shirpser: I did. I always felt that if I didn't exemplify a different point of view, or wasn't free to say what I believed, especially on issues--I think a campaign should be too, on issues--even if they're not popular ones, at least you get people thinking about them, and maybe the next person can do better.

II THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE CALIFORNIA STATE ASSEMBLY
(Interview 2, May 25, 1972)

Chall: We're going to talk today about your candidacy for the Eighteenth Assembly District, so perhaps you can tell me what prompted your decision to be a candidate.

Shirpser: I believe we covered that in the preceding interview. I know all candidates say they were "drafted," but I really was! I had no intention of running for political office. I was very happy in the work I was doing with the league, and felt I was accomplishing a good deal, but when all these young people, who came to see me with Professor Frank Newman, told me they needed me and they wanted someone to rally around, I waited until the last minute, hoping they'd find someone else. It was a tough race, running against the incumbent Tom Caldecott, and it was obvious he was going to win, but no one else would run.

When I was talking to India Edwards recently, this was her comment, that women usually are supported for public office in a district which can't possibly be won. I really think this is true, because at the time I ran for the assembly, there were four other women candidates in other assembly districts who ran; two were nominated in the primary. I thought they were exceptionally well-qualified, capable, and well-educated women, and not one of us won in the general election. And I believe this was chiefly true because we were all running in districts that could not be won; the incumbents were solidly entrenched.

Cross-filing still existed then. Statistics showed that 75 to 80 percent of all incumbents were reelected. When the party label is not listed, the voters do not know the political party of the candidates. In fact, to corroborate this, after Earl Warren, Republican, had been attorney general and had held other political offices, a questionnaire was put out, when he was running for governor, asking, "Is Earl Warren a Democrat or

Shirpser: a Republican?" and because he was a liberal Republican, the poll showed overwhelmingly that people thought he was a Democrat.

This was one of the reasons, of course, we had to get rid of cross-filing, and I worked very hard at that. I think there has been an improvement in politics since we abolished cross-filing. At least you know the party of the man or woman you're voting for.

The Enthusiastic Supporters

Chall: Could you tell me something about Frank Newman? Had he been active in politics prior to this?

Shirpser: I think he'd always been interested and active. When we asked him to do the research on the model city charter for us and to check other cases which involved the public interest, he spent a whole weekend at the law library. I believe that is when he became actively interested. After that, he sponsored legislation, particularly on the high cost of elections and the need for election reform. He was very active in Jimmy Roosevelt's campaign; he did a lot of research for him. He helped me over and over. I was in Washington once when I needed some material by the next day for a congressional committee hearing on election law reform, where I had been asked to testify by Senator Thomas Henning. I phoned him, and he called back and gave me some wonderfully helpful information. He always has been excellent when you needed to call on him.

Chall: I see. But active participation had not been his role up until this time?

Shirpser: I don't believe so. Maybe I'm not speaking accurately, but I really don't believe so.

Chall: So he and these students, all new to party politics, decided that this was the time, and that you were their candidate.

Shirpser: Yes, and they really provided the bulk of my volunteers; they were full of ideas and one of my big problems was to hold them down. I never have forgotten that I went to a meeting, and all of a sudden, a group came up to the platform and they started

Shirpser: singing to the tune of "Yes, Sir, She's My Baby," they sang, "Yes Sir, She's My Lady," with a whole stanza of their composition. When they finished, I looked at them and said, "Now I've heard everything." [Laughter]

Once I heard someone was in a sound truck campaigning for me, who said, "You have a date with destiny! Elect Clara Shirpser." They were so enthusiastic, that they were really rather extravagant at times. Then somebody saw my election poster riding in the midst of a parade of candidates for yell leader at the University of California. You never knew where campaign material for me was going to turn up.

Chall: These were students in law?

Shirpser: On no, not necessarily. They were in political science, and economics and several other departments as well as law students. I think most were people in political science. Professor Peter Odegard was extremely helpful to me with creative and effective advice. I think that one of the best parts of my campaign was that I interested so many capable young men and women to actively participate in politics who hadn't previously, because they'd had quite a derogatory opinion of it. At least, they knew that I was sincere, and that I believed in what I was doing, and this gave a real impetus to their participation.

Perhaps at this point I should say that one of my real satisfactions was in encouraging young men and women to choose political careers. I was in Hawaii years later, and a very attractive young man came up, kissed me on both cheeks and said, "Aloha, Clara." I knew he looked familiar but I could not remember his name. He was deeply hurt. He said, "Surely you remember me. I rang more doorbells for you than anybody ever did in history. I'm Tom Gill." He was then lieutenant governor of Hawaii. He came into politics first in my campaign. This happened to me with Congressman Jerome Waldie too, who said his first plunge into politics was working very hard for me, while he was a law student at Cal, and now he's a most effective and capable congressman. I think I started Jeff Cohelan in politics, too. I know I gave him his first appointment on the Democratic State Central Committee. I had the opportunity to make two appointments for men and one for a woman. I'm very proud of having started U.S. Senator Alan Cranston in his political career when I organized a Democratic club in his district, at his request, of which he became president.

Shirpser: This has been one of the really good things that I have felt I've accomplished--to interest people and urge them to choose political careers.

Chall: Did I see or did you mention Robert Crown once before--was he involved in your campaign?

Shirpser: No, I don't believe he was. But he was always very helpful to me and a good friend. He ran for the assembly first in Alameda and I campaigned for him. He lost by less than fifty votes. There were many errors made in that election. I went with him and his campaign manager to Sacramento to the legislative election committee and we tried to point out these errors.

For instance, a woman and her son were in charge of an election booth, and they got tired of counting ballots in the voting booth, so they took them home with them, which, of course, is against the law. In a district that was normally heavily Democratic, Bob's Republican opponent turned up the winner. That one error I referred to above was enough to throw the whole election out, but we could not convince the elections' committee to vote that way.

So Bob Crown ran again two years later, and won by a big majority.

Younger people in the Democratic party often turned to me, knowing that I would help them to the best of my ability, because so often they're discouraged because they're considered too young, and the older people in the party feel they can't win. So, it was a real joy to me to help capable young people to achieve political office.

Organizing the Campaign: Labor's Endorsement

Chall: So, you were drafted. And you accepted at the last minute.

Shirpser: That's true. One hour before the filing closed.

Chall: Well, then you probably went into high gear immediately.

Shirpser: Well, I had to. Prior to my decision to run, I told my friends, who had by then pretty loosely formed themselves into a committee while urging me to run, that I knew I needed the labor endorsement,

Shirpser: and that if I couldn't get it, I thought it would be folly for me to run.

The labor committee which interviewed candidates asked me to come at 3:00 p.m., and I arrived on time. At 3:30 p.m. no one had come near me, and at 4:00 p.m., no one yet had arrived, and I was getting more and more angry, because it seemed to me someone at least should have come and explained the long delay. They didn't call me until about 4:15 p.m. I went in there in rather a belligerent mood, I'm afraid.

When I walked into this huge room, the members of the committee--perhaps ten or twelve--were scattered at the far edges of the room. One was way over in the corner on the left; one on the right; one in the middle. And I thought to myself, "This is a nice cozy group to talk to." You know, they were way apart from each other, and you'd have no sense of identification with a group that's so scattered. The chairman, who was on a platform in front of a podium, looked at me and asked me to sit down. He said, "So you're seeking to be the candidate in the Eighteenth Assembly District." And I said, "No, I'm really not seeking it. I'm being urged to run. No one else would run against Tom Caldecott, so I think that I am the only one who's willing to take on this task, and if I receive your endorsement, I'll run. If I don't, I don't think I'll have a chance of making it, so I won't. If I do run, of course, I'll do my utmost to put on the best campaign I can."

One man over in the corner said, "What did you think of prohibition?" And I said, "I beg your pardon. I thought you said, what did I think of prohibition." He said, "I did." So I said, "Well, really, this isn't exactly germane to my race, but I think prohibition was terrible." He said, "Why was it terrible?" I said, "Among other things, it forced people who were law-abiding citizens (but who wanted a drink) to either buy liquor illegally or go to speakeasys." He said, "Define a speakeasy." So, by that time, I thought, "They're really heckling me," and I looked at him and I said, "A speakeasy is a place where they sell very bad liquor at very high prices." Well, that sort of wowed the boys; they laughed and laughed and realized I wasn't a "bluestocking" or only interested in high-level issues, and much of the tension went out of the meeting. After that it was much easier.

I had to give "wrong" answers from their point of view to most of the questions they asked. For instance, they said,

Shirpser: "Where do you live?", and I told them; and they said, "Is it up in the hills?", and I said, "Yes." This was an upper middle class neighborhood rather than a poorer one, such as West Berkeley was. Then they asked me if I'd ever worked, and I said, "No, only part-time when I went to college." What had I done? I said I had been an employer, and I'd had quite a few employees, and never had any labor trouble. What did my husband do? I said, "He owns his own business." So you see I was giving answers that were not congenial to them, and I realized this, but I had to tell them the truth.

This questioning went on, and we weren't getting any place, so I finally pulled out their own evaluation of the twelve most important bills in the last legislative session, and I said to them, "I would think that what you care about is how I react to the bills you consider the most important, and what I think of my opponent's vote on those bills." They looked a little surprised. I had done some research on this, and I felt I was prepared. Again, my League of Women Voters' training was helpful there.

I went down the line talking briefly about each issue, telling my opponent's vote, and why I would have voted the opposite way. When I got through, a large man got to his feet, and he put his hands on his hips, and he looked at me, and he said, "Do you know" in rather stern voice, and I'd been warned this was the sort of difficult questioning I had to expect. He said, "Do you know this is the first time I have heard a candidate come to a meeting, not hat in hand, but telling us what we need to know." He said, "I don't have to ask you any more questions. I'm for you."

Of course, this delighted me, and at this point, the chairman said, "Well, I think our interview is over." I said, "Just a minute, please. May I ask you some questions?" A look of surprise was on everybody's face. Evidently nobody had ever done this before either. I said, "You know, I'm starting from scratch. I haven't any organization. I've talked to the chairman of the Democratic county committee, and as far as I can tell, there's no organization there that's going to help me. I've got to find headquarters, I've got to get mailing pieces, I've got to decide which issues to emphasize.

Already, friends have formed a splendid committee which will help me on all these things, but I need some substantial help from you. Now, your endorsement will cost me some votes, but I want it badly. But what are you going to do to help me? What can I depend on in terms of workers and materials and

Shirpser: publicity and funds? Just what does your endorsement mean to me? You know I'm an amateur in politics, and I'm asking this in good faith."

The chairman looked at me and said, "Mrs. Shirpser, if you get our endorsement, we will then discuss with you what you need, and we will attempt to help you." So on this note I thanked them, shook hands all around, and left. And on my way home, I was worrying all the way I should have said this, and I shouldn't have said that. I was sure I wasn't going to get the endorsement, and then I wouldn't have to run, and that was just as well!

As I came home and put my key in the lock, I heard the phone ringing. I rushed in and grabbed the phone, and there was the labor committee chairman, and he said, "Clara--because I'm going to call you that from here on--we endorsed you unanimously. We like and admire a good, intelligent fighter. We'll do everything we can to help you." I was overjoyed, because this was my first big test, and they had commenced the interview being rather hostile to me. I thought, "Maybe I can run a good race!" It gave me a tremendous encouragement, and I did get fine help from the labor group.

Chall: Now, could I ask you a question here? At that time, were the CIO and AFL one organization? Which group were you speaking to that day?

Shirpser: I think that this was a joint meeting of the AFL and CIO, which I don't believe were joined then. They got together under the title of "League for Political Education." So that they were the ones who really officially backed me, and then the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen did, independently, too. I spoke to that group, and they gave me fine backing too.

There was the Labor Journal. In every issue, there was fine publicity and interviews, and this Journal went to their whole membership and introduced me to people who'd never heard of me before. Also they gave me effective workers before the election. Sometimes they came to my meetings--my street meetings--and they would advise me afterwards of what they thought I did effectively, and as to what would be more effective; they provided me with a couple of radio programs; they sent out mailing pieces endorsing me, including the postage. These were based on those twelve issues of which I'd spoken to them--showing my opponent's votes which were contrary to the labor viewpoint.

Stating the Issues

Chall: It looks as if you might have given them the idea.

Shirpser: It was called the official voting record of Thomas Caldecott, the incumbent, in the Eighteenth Assembly District, and it wasn't signed by me; it was signed by the AFL-CIO and the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen. Because I was careful not to attack Mr. Caldecott personally, but to publicize his voting record. He really was a nice guy, and I said this often although my supporters didn't like me to do so. But I thought that we could run a campaign without vituperation and name-calling, and he did the same thing where I was concerned.

The reason I was running was because I didn't like his voting record, and I would speak of that. For instance, he didn't vote for aid to needy children, or on benefits for workmen's compensation, or on county relief, as it was called then, which would be called social welfare now. In my opinion, he had some bad votes against benefits for unemployment insurance, for projects which would have interfered with the unified development of the Central Valley Project. He voted for an income tax reduction bill which only benefitted the upper income brackets. There were many issues on which we disagreed. In other words the labor committee had tabulated twelve bills, and on six of them, he'd had what the labor groups and I considered a bad vote. He was absent or didn't vote on 25 percent of these important bills. He did have a good vote on three. But that's only 25 percent of "good votes," which is not, really, the kind of record we wanted to support.

Chall: So basically he was a conservative Republican?

Shirpser: Right. Again, he voted to keep bills bottled up in committee, such as the abolition of cross-filing, and there had been a continuous struggle for years to get it out of committee. He voted to keep a bill on health insurance bottled up in committee, and also on fair employment practices, all of which, later, did come out of committee and were favorably voted upon. So, it shows that his record really was reactionary on many issues.

Chall: I've noticed that these are the issues set forth in your campaign materials. You were for cross-filing--

Shirpser: No, for the abolition of cross-filing!

Chall: Excuse me, yes, and you picked up issues like a better tax system, and better housing and health facilities--

Shirpser: And education, too. With the support of so many University professors and students, obviously that would be one of my main issues. For instance, to get a more generous budget for the University of California--beginning with grade school up to the university level.

Chall: I wasn't sure just what was meant by "The effective development and use of natural resources in California"--what did you have in mind there?

Shirpser: One of them was that 160-acre limitation. Large farm corporations were lobbying to have that eliminated; Professor Paul Taylor fought for many years for the 160-acre limitation because more and more of the farmers were being forced out of their individual farms. That really was the basis of California's agricultural development in the past. If they couldn't get that needed assignment of water--and vast amounts of water were going to the huge corporation farms--it really was very unfair. That was one of the issues, and while it didn't affect this district, particularly, it was a very important statewide issue, and it was very much in the forefront of discussion at that point.

We started to talk, even that long ago, about water and air pollution, and dumping sewage, and many other related issues. You know, I'd always been interested in this and spoke up for it, and there had been no legislation at that point, as far as I know, that would have protected the environment.

Chall: So you did speak on those two issues with respect to the effective use of natural resources?

Shirpser: Yes.

The Campaign Organization

Chall: Did your committee help you to define the issues that you were going to run on?

Shirpser: Yes. You see, I had a capable, highly-qualified executive committee.

Chall: And who were they?

Shirpser: They were chiefly what I called the campaign committee, and Ted Benner (whose first name was Frederick) was my chairman. He was an attorney, and he devoted a great deal of time to my campaign. He lent me a station wagon to campaign in, and it was all covered with big signs like "Elect Clara Shirpser," and it had a back to it which could be let down and when we had our street meetings, which I'm going to tell you about later, I'd climb up on this back platform and talk from there; it gave me a raised place to stand. He came to practically all my meetings with me, and often had executive committee meetings at his home, and he contributed generously. He and his wife, Ruth, really were perfectly wonderful to me. I hadn't known him well up to that time.

Then Mayor Cross was on my committee, and John Alexander, who was president of the Young Democrats, and Mrs. Milton Chernin, whose husband was head of the social welfare department at the University; Jeff Cohelan, who became our fine congressman; Frank Cornish, who'd been former mayor of Berkeley; Professor Malcolm Davisson, who was head of the Department of Economics at Cal; several businessmen; several women--some of them professional women, some of them business women; Robert Ratcliff, an architect, who had held many posts in the city government; several representatives of minority groups; Jack Tolan, who was the son of our former congressmen, Jack Tolan, Sr.; Glenn Harmon, an attorney; Mrs. Harold Leupp, whose husband was head of the U.C. library, was one of my dearest friends and helpers. It was a splendidly balanced committee. A few members of my committee were Republicans.

Chall: Even during the primary?

Shirpser: Yes, even during the primary, you see, under cross-filing...

Chall: Oh, cross-filing, of course.

Shirpser: It really was a fine committee and I started out with a wonderful group of sponsors. They sent out an excellent fund-raising letter. I really didn't have any serious problems with finances, believe it or not. Friends were generous, and people saw me as a new type of candidate, and of course a great many of my friends in the League of Women Voters. No one on the board could officially support me, but they could vote the way they wanted to, and they could contribute through relatives.

Shirpser: People who were not members of the board really gave me tremendous help and support.

I might say here that I wasn't prepared for the lack of Democratic party organization. At one point, I looked in a phone book, and I couldn't find one listing where you could call a Democratic County Central Committee, a Democratic Congressional Committee, a Democratic State Central Committee. There was one in San Francisco, but there was nothing in the East Bay.

When I decided to run, I went to the Alameda county chairman who was a friend, too. I said, "I know that this is a difficult campaign, but I want to do as well as I can. What kind of help will you give me?" He sat down and wrote out a check for \$50. I said, "Well, this is wonderful. But what about workers, and what about advice, and what about some kind of organization for my campaign, and what about fund-raising events?" He said, "Oh no, you'll have to form your own organization." I said, "Do you mean to say that I have to start from scratch? That I'm not going to get any help at all from the Alameda County Central Committee?" He said, "I'll speak to a few people and see if I can't get you a few contributions."

That was as far as he thought his responsibility went. I couldn't believe it. I thought, there's supposed to be a Democratic party. I'm the Democratic candidate--no opponents. If there were opponents, the County Central Committees can't take a stand. Nobody else in his right mind would run against Tom Caldecott, and I was their only candidate. Where was I to get help?

We found a little headquarters on University Avenue. It was very inexpensive. He let us put up a big placard outside the office, which was good, because of the buses and autos going up and down University Avenue. This gave us a central place to work. Each day we had four or five volunteers in this office. It used to be said that people with purple ink on their fingers were Clara's supporters, because we bought a second-hand mimeographing machine which leaked, and it had had so much purple ink in it, we couldn't get the purple ink out. So we decided we might as well stay with the purple ink.

My volunteers were wonderful. Even though a lot of them had to drop out, from day to day they would almost always take

Shirpser: the responsibility of finding somebody to take their place. I always had a large group of volunteers. Everyone welcomed drop-in people and would talk to them and discuss my campaign. We got many new volunteers that way. It was an exceptional committee; I'm very proud of them. [Laughter]

Campaign Activities

Chall: Yes, did you have to devote much time to the organization of the campaign, the maintenance of the office, or were you free to go around and do your speaking without having to worry about these kinds of details?

Shirpser: I was busy from early morning to late at night. I divided my days as best I could among these things. Naturally, I needed and wanted speaking engagements. We had a committee that sought them. My hardest entry was into businessmen's groups, but then I had enough businessmen on my committee who belonged to organizations to insist on fair play. I'll read the list for you of the groups I spoke to: Soroptimists, Zonta Club, American Association of University Women, the Women's Committee for Peace, Business and Professional Women's Club, and many home neighborhood meetings. Then I received invitations to luncheons at the Rotary Club, the Lions Club, the Elks Club, and the Junior and Senior Chambers of Commerce.

Chall: Now, they would of course expect that Mr. Caldecott would appear at another luncheon?

Shirpser: Oh yes, of course.

Chall: Up until time, Mr. Caldecott had not worried about the opposition?

Shirpser: He probably hadn't because you see, there had never been a Democrat elected from the Eighteenth Assembly District.

Chall: Had they ever tried?

Shirpser: Yes, but the candidate hadn't been able to mobilize much support and hadn't won the primary election. I was the first woman to ever win the primary in the Eighteenth Assembly District. Tom Caldecott was well liked and supported by people who shared his conservative point of view.

Shirpser: His father was campaigning too. You see, I really had father and son as opponents. They weren't senior and junior--they had different middle initials. Their billboards said, "Reelect Tom Caldecott." They never used a picture on the campaign literature or billboards. Tom Caldecott, the older, had been mayor of Berkeley, and he was a member of the Board of Supervisors, and that name was well known in this district.

I think a great many people who voted for Tom Caldecott thought they were voting for "Papa." Because, whenever Tom Caldecott, the elder, spoke, he would always say, "Elect Tom Caldecott." Many people told me this. He'd never say, "Elect my son." He'd say, "Reelect Tom Caldecott." And people--often they're not too well informed. [Laughter]

So, I really had two opponents campaigning against me all the time. It was mighty tough campaigning for me. I did get a very fair reception from various groups in my campaign. Many questions were asked me, and I gave the answers that I thought should be given. I wasn't expedient. If I were speaking about fair employment practices, business people did not like my stand, but I thought it was absolutely basic and necessary and had to come, and so I said.

In many cases I did pick up support from people who didn't always agree with me, but respected the fact that I spoke frankly and forthrightly. Later when Adlai Stevenson said, "Talk sense to the people," I thought, in my small way that I had done that, too. I didn't try to speak in vague generalities; I tried to tell about what I stood for.

Chall: There was a ballot measure on at that time; I think it was in 1950. And that was the George McClain "welfare reform." It was a revision of the method of administering welfare. Did you have to consider whether you would gain or lose voters by a stand you would take on some particularly controversial issue like that and therefore decide not to discuss it?

Shirpser: I have ambivalent feelings about George McClain. I do think he did a great deal for older people. I think, at the same time, he enriched himself and that a lot of the things he proposed had a self-interest motive in them. I haven't used it in any of my campaign literature, so I could not have been for it.

Chall: I think the League of Women Voters was opposed to it.

Shirpser: Yes. But I must in all fairness say that he did mobilize the elderly; he did have influence for bills benefitting them. When he lobbied, he did speak for many thousands of elderly people.

Chall: You did know him then?

Shirpser: I had met him only casually. I think he sent out some literature in my district, endorsing me, without asking me. I did not list him as a sponsor, as you notice. I didn't speak on that issue--unless people questioned me, and then I think I replied much as I'm doing to you: that I believed it was tremendously important to get many of the things he spoke for incorporated in our legal and legislative system, but that there were many things that I didn't like in it that I didn't support it.

Chall: Some candidates for office, particularly if they're in an area where there are diverse kinds of people, and they're afraid of making enemies by their stand on political issues, will attempt either not to meet these people, or not to take a stand on an issue at all. I was wondering whether you had this kind of a difficulty?

Shirpser: No, if anything, I was too outspoken. I was determined to run on what I believed, and this brought me a lot of support. It also undoubtedly cost me some votes, but I can't remember ever being expedient. I really think I can say that in all sincerity.

Billboards and Expediency

Chall: Were you advised occasionally to be more--expedient?

Shirpser: Oh yes, of course. I had people telling me all the time that I was speaking out too strongly for liberal issues. This is even true of some of the members of my executive committee. I would discuss it with them, and try to be as objective as I could, and then make my own decisions. I don't think that I ever was pressured to do anything that I felt I shouldn't do.

Now for instance, I haven't told you yet about my experience in renting billboards. When I owned and managed this store previously, we had billboards all over Berkeley--from Foster and

Shirpser: Kleiser, and Special Site Company. When I decided to be a candidate one of the first things I did was to phone the billboard companies, saying, "I want a showing of billboards. I'm running for the assembly." They all said, "Fine"--they'd send me the available locations. I didn't get any list of locations, so I called again and said, "I want to pick these out quickly before the good locations are gone. I have the funds."

Then a billboard executive said, "All the billboards are gone." I said, "Now, when I first called you, you said many locations were available. Are you saying 'no' now because I'm a Democratic candidate, or because I'm a woman candidate?" "Oh no, it's just all the billboards have been spoken for." I said, "You know, I really don't believe you, and I think this is shocking." He said, "We're terribly sorry. There's nothing we can do about it."

Naturally, everytime I made a speech, I mentioned this, because an effective showing of billboards could have been the difference between winning and losing. The fact that I, as a Democratic candidate, could not get a single large billboard any place in my district was really unfair discrimination. All I could get were some small placard boards in obscure locations. I guess they were 3' by 6' and wherever we could stick those up we did. Driving by quickly you couldn't read them. They were much too small to be readable.

Chall: You made them yourselves; you printed them?

Shirpser: Some of my volunteers made them. Others we had printed. We were allowed to put them up in quite a few places where I had supporters. But with Berkeley people it is particularly important to have billboards because there are so many commuters, and if you've got billboards on strategic areas on Telegraph, College Avenue, University Avenue, Shattuck Avenue, it means a great deal. And I couldn't get them.

I kept speaking of this, every time I made a speech which was often [laughter], actually because it was an unfair practice that should be aired. A friend of mine called me after the campaign was well along and I was doing quite well, and she said she was outraged by my not being able to rent billboards. Her father was an attorney for Artie Samish.

I'm speaking of this because I don't see any reason why I shouldn't mention this incident. If you read Collier's, I think it was August, 1949, there was an article about Artie

Shirpser: Samish, which got national publicity, in which he stated that he controlled the legislature by the large sums of money he gave as a lobbyist, by billboards, by other means of which he spoke. Then the Collier's interviewer asked Governor Earl Warren, "If you have something of importance before the legislature, and Artie Samish is opposed to it, who has more influence with the legislature, Artie Samish or you?" And Earl Warren said, "Artie Samish."

Senator Kefauver later brought out in his congressional investigation, a great deal of factual material on Artie Samish and his lobbying practices which were so illegal that he was indicted and sent to jail.

This friend said she was going to call her father who lived in Southern California, and she was going to tell him about the fact that I couldn't get billboards, and she was positive that he could arrange for me to have billboards without cost. The temptation was one of the greatest in my life. I wanted those billboards so badly, and my opponent had many in strategic locations.

But I said, "I appreciate your interest. I appreciate your cooperation, but if they come through Artie Samish, I can't take them." She said, "Oh, you must have misunderstood me. No one will ever know. My father will handle the whole thing." And I said, "Artie Samish will know, and I will know. If I get elected, and I go to Sacramento and have to take orders from Artie Samish, with the threat that he will expose me if I don't vote as he wants me to, there's no use in my being elected."

She said, "You can't be serious. I heard you say those billboards were the difference between election and defeat." I said, "I still think so." She said, "Clara, I admire your integrity, but I think you're a damned fool!" And she hung up.

Well, I felt virtuous. Here I'd met temptation and resisted it. So, I called together some of the people who held political office in my area. I wanted to tell them about this episode. I thought they'd be proud of me.

Chall: Who were these people?

Shirpser: Some members of the Alameda County Central Committee, and other people who were district chairmen, and so on. I thought they ought to know this; that it would increase their support of me.

Shirpser: Instead, they looked at me strangely, and they shook their heads as if to say, "Who is this maverick who wandered into the fold?" They said, "You're telling us the truth? You were offered billboards without cost from Artie Samish and you turned them down?" And I said, "Yes." They would ask me that same question in many different ways. One of them even said, "I think you're crazy!" Another one said, "Come off cloud nine. Call them right away and say you changed your mind." Somebody said, "How does it feel to be so noble?"

I certainly didn't get any approbation from any of those people for what I had done. But it didn't change my mind. I was absolutely convinced I had done the right thing. I called my executive committee members to a meeting and a large majority of them thought I had made the right decision. They all said, they would work even harder. But some of the political office holders thought the same thing as my friend who wanted to get me the billboards from Artie Samish--that I had been naive, I had been a damned fool, and I might have won with those billboards, and I might lose without them.

That was a cynical and depressing incident to me.

Chall: Now, this was during the primary. You won anyway, of course, without the billboards.

Shirpser: I'm not sure it was in the primary. I'm not sure whether it was the primary or the general election. I haven't been able to pinpoint that. I would think it was much more likely it would be in the general because I had won the primary, you see, and I was much more electable, obviously, in Mr. Samish's eyes--there was a chance I might win, and so he wanted to have me in the fold too.

Chall: Did you ever find out why you didn't get the billboards?

Shirpser: He controlled, according to information I had, a large percentage of all the billboards in California and gave them to candidates who would be influenced by him.

Chall: So you think that it was he who prevented you from getting them in the first place, but he would have offered them to you had you been willing to take the offer?

Shirpser: Well, I can't say with complete assurance he would have. My friend was absolutely sure her father could convince him that I

Shirpser: had a good chance of winning, and therefore it would be to his best interests to give me some billboards.

I don't want to be unjust to Mr. Samish, because he didn't personally offer them to me. But the connection was close enough, because my friend was absolutely positive that her father could get them for me from Mr. Samish.

So, I didn't have them, and I did lose the general election.

Chall: Do you still feel that the difference between winning and losing are the billboards?

Shirpser: I think they have a tremendous effect--in certain areas. If you were in a rural area I don't think it would mean that much. But I certainly think in a town like Berkeley, where so many people leave each morning, and come back later in the day, that if you have billboards on both sides of the street, here and there, you certainly attract--at least your name is before the public all the time.

Press Coverage

Shirpser: That brings me to another thing--the difficulty of getting fair press coverage. In places where there is only one newspaper--only the Berkeley Gazette, in Berkeley, only the Oakland Tribune, in Oakland, it is hard to get press coverage. Both newspapers supported Mr. Caldecott heartily. No matter how good the press releases I had--and I had some awfully good ones, and the names of my sponsors were very, very impressive--the press coverage was minimal.

I had sent the Oakland Tribune a really good article, listing forty U.C. professors who were endorsing me. Don Thomas, while he was the political editor there, was extremely friendly to me. I had a fine relationship with many reporters. "Squire" Earl Behrens at the San Francisco Chronicle became a good friend. Both were Republican papers, and both didn't agree with my stand on issues often. But both political editors were so helpful to me and I've kept up a friendship with them.

Don Thomas has moved away now. But I still see Squire Behrens and his wife, Bernice, who's head of the State Department

Shirpser: Reception Center. I could talk to them off the record, frankly, and they to me; we trusted each other, and they often told me things that were extremely helpful.

Don Thomas at the Oakland Tribune would have used my story completely, but the editor cut the press release to five lines mentioning, "several University of California professors are supporting Mrs. Shirpser." Next to it, they had a story with a picture of Tom Caldecott, and a whole column, practically, devoted to the fact that he had one English professor supporting him from the University of California. About a dozen quotes from this English professor at the University of California were used. Not one quote for me, and since the story didn't appear for two or three days after I sent it in, all I can figure is they called Caldecott and said, "Look, she's sending in all this stuff. You'd better find a University professor for you."

It was a blatant example of discrimination, where forty University professors were not listed by name or by department, eliminating the fact that three of them were chairmen of departments. But one University professor in the English department supporting my opponent got a full column.

This was the sort of thing I was up against in the press and that's why my committee, realizing that I wasn't going to get good newspaper coverage, and that we wouldn't have enough money for large enough ads that would be effective, decided we had to do more precinct-organization work.

Street-corner Rallies

Shirpser: A group of Young Democrats called on me one day and said, "We have an idea we want to discuss with you." And I knew from the tone it was going to be something rather extraordinary. They said, "We were at Hambone Kelly's last night, and they've got a marvelous jazz band there. We went up and talked to them, and they're all Democrats. So we've been working all day, and we've gotten the loan of a flat-bed truck, and we've gotten the loan of a huge searchlight that will go up in the sky, and we've gotten Hambone Kelly's orchestra to play between 6:00 and 8:30 p.m.--they have to go to work at 9:00 p.m. We think this is a great idea, but we know you won't do it. We would like to go into the

Shirpser: areas where there are the most Democrats, such as West Berkeley, and we'll have the jazz band play, and then we'll announce over a loudspeaker that you are our candidate, and you're going to speak to them. The minute we finish playing and go on to the next location, you start talking."

So I gulped a couple of times and said, "Well, if you've gone to all this work, planning, and you think it's a good idea, I'll do it." So they all kissed me and hugged me, and they were full of enthusiasm. They would plan five or six meetings in a night--and we did this on several nights. They would walk up and down the neighborhood the night before our street meetings, give out handbills, telling the people what was going to happen, giving the approximate time, so they'd be prepared and ready to come when they heard the music.

We had to notify the police department. There might have been big crowds, and there sometimes were, depending on the area, and so they decided to send a police escort with us, and that meant sirens.

Chall: Oh, the whole thing.

Shirpser: Yes! The police officers were simply great. They would sort of circulate through the crowd, listening to the reaction. And then we often met in a home afterwards, to compare what people said in the audience, and what they thought had been effective, and what hadn't been good.

Ad, my husband, was driving me to all of these meetings. Of course, Ad gave me many good suggestions, too. One of the things that was bad was the klieg light that was supposed to shine on me from the back. Much of the time it would not work. Then someone would shine a flashlight in my eyes, so I couldn't see anything, and it was distracting. But the worst thing was that my young people often did not stick to the schedule. They would tell us where the next meeting was. We'd get to where the next meeting was supposed to be, and no one was there. So we'd look up into the sky, and wherever there was a searchlight, that was where our meeting was. And we'd work our way toward that searchlight. To this day, when I see a searchlight in the sky, I have this impulse to rush to where it is, because I know that's where I'm supposed to speak! [Laughter] That happened night after night.

Chall: How many nights did you do this?

Shirpser: We did this at least five or six times.

Chall: And how many places did you go to a night?

Shirpser: Five, six sometimes.

Chall: How did you speak--I mean what happened to your voice--was there a microphone?

Shirpser: Yes, they had a mike. Sometimes it worked! And if there weren't a big group, I'd say, "Please come closer. I can talk to you better." It was hard on my voice. Sometimes it was cold and windy, and I'd be bundled up to the ears. In fact, in this picture I can see that I had a hat and a coat pulled around me, because this was in the general election, I believe, and it was getting cold. The election was November second.

These street meetings did get publicity. The newspapers couldn't avoid sending reporters and using my press releases.

Chall: That made news.

Shirpser: Yes, it did make news, and they usually had a big poster up along side of me that they couldn't help but see. It was printed in enormous letters. And I think it did a great deal of good. At least, I got to the people, and they knew me, and I could shake hands when there was time, and I got a feeling of identification with the people--a source of strength to me.

Often at the last minute, it would get to be 5:00, 5:30 p.m. and I'd think--"What am I going to have for dinner?", and I'd dash into a supermarket. Of course, my car was plastered up with big banners, "Elect Clara Shirpser." Many times a man dressed in working clothes would walk up to me as I was crossing the sidewalk to the store, and he would say, "You're Clara Shirpser?" I'd say, "Yes," and out would come his hand to shake: "Clara, you're my candidate," and that was heart-warming. It really made me feel that there was a sense of rapport between us. They know what I'm trying to do, and they trust me and like me. That made me feel good; it was a real "meet the people" sort of campaign.

Walking the Precincts

Chall: Well, it indicated you were getting your message across somehow to the man in the street, in whatever ways you had.

Shirpser: Yes. Then the precinct work. We covered many neighborhoods, walking in pairs and ringing doorbells, handing my campaign literature, and urging votes for Clara Shirpser. That idea again came from the young people. Usually Democratic votes come from the lower and middle-income brackets, although I did get support up in the hills, too. But where the Democrats were concentrated were in those West Berkeley areas and in the downtown areas. So we did a lot of precinct work, and we usually went in twos, and I went with them. I thought, if they were willing to do this hard work, it was good for them to know that I was, too.

I rang the doorbells and said, "I'm Clara Shirpser. I hope you'll help me in the assembly race." Usually, somebody would answer, "Nobody ever did this before. If you care that much, I'm going to help you." This was a good reaction; some funny things happened to me, too.

We often got separated; I don't know how, but we often did. When we were in Albany one night, I was supposed to take two blocks on the one side of the street with a "partner." But I lost him, somehow; he probably went on while I was talking with a householder. I walked along, and I came to a place called the Albany Steambaths, and I thought, "I can't go in there alone!" Then I thought, "Well, if it's on my beat, I better do it." So I walked in, and there was this man wearing a small sleeveless vest and white pants, and he looked at me and said, "This is for men only." So I said, "I thought it must be, though it didn't say so. I'm Clara Shirpser, I'm a candidate for the assembly, and I'd like to ask your support." So he said, "You want to come in and meet the boys?" [Laughter] I asked: "Will they be covered up?" He said, "Sure!"

So he went ahead and he told them I was coming in and here were all of these men lying on massage tables, and covered up with sheets, and they all looked at me in amazement. I stood in the doorway and I said, "Your leader invited me to come in here. I never intended to campaign in here. But if I leave some literature, will you read it?" Somebody said, "Any gal who's got that kind of guts should be elected." I went out of there shaking with fright. I didn't know what was going to

Shirpser: happen to me next! So I had a good story to tell that night at our home meeting which followed, with precinct workers.

There were a lot of other amusing incidents, but I never before or since have been in a men's steambath.

Chall: Were you ever met by hostility or hecklers along either your precinct route or in these street-corner meetings?

Shirpser: Yes, I think people were "planted" in the street meetings often, to ask questions. But you learned to cope with them. I remember chiefly at a meeting at the University of California, where some of my supporters planned a bipartisan meeting--I think Tom Caldecott couldn't come that day, and sent a representative. I was speaking and several young men, who were obviously young Republicans, were asking the most hostile questions that they could think of. Before I could answer, one young man kept interrupting me, so that finally I said, "Now, look. You haven't let me finish a sentence yet. You asked me a question. Have the courtesy to keep quiet, so I can answer you. Besides, you're too young to be so closed-minded. You might try to listen to me with an open mind." I got a big hand from the audience--from the whole group--because this man really had been heckling me. He was deliberately trying to annoy me and get me aggravated, angry and belligerent. I was determined that I wouldn't be, because Professor Peter Odegard had arranged this meeting, and I didn't want to embarrass him.

You learn how to cope. I think you're much more effective if you can keep from getting angry. It takes a lot of self-control sometimes. But if you can speak quietly and say what you need to say, it often carries some weight. I didn't have much heckling at meetings. I remember a few incidents, of course, but I think they were people who were planted rather than people who came just to listen.

But, we had some interesting experiences out in Cordornices Village, too. They had a barn dance, which was quite a function. And I was dancing all evening. I learned to do a lot of dances I'd never done before! But it was fun. We did a lot of precinct walking there because there were many young married couples there, who went to the University.

Chall: Cordornices Village was what?

Shirpser: It was a housing project. Mostly for the married University students.

Chall: Low-cost housing?

Shirpser: Yes, low-cost housing, and very simple--almost primitive in some cases, but it was shelter and a roof over your head, and it was very inexpensive. It was in West Berkeley--I think below San Pablo Avenue.

My most effective campaigners there were Mr. and Mrs. Jim Thatcher. That cake in the picture was really a lovely idea of theirs. They gave me a surprise party--found out when my birthday was. A group of them came to my home with this gorgeous cake, and in the middle of it was a little toy chair, and the inscription on the cake was, "We hope your seat in the assembly will be comfortable."

Chall: That's lovely.

Shirpser: Jim Thatcher was head of the Young Democrats--they don't live here any more. And Shirley, his wife, was a very attractive girl, and they had a beautiful baby. I think that she did more good precinct work for me than any other person, because she would take the lovely baby in the buggy, and she'd ring doorbells, and all the women would come out and "ooh" and "ah" over this beautiful baby. Then Shirley would give them my campaign literature and say she cared so much about my getting elected that she was doing precinct work every single day wheeling her baby in her buggy.

Minnie Lou Eakin told me she did without a new winter coat to give me a substantial contribution. Somebody else gave up buying a new hat. Really, I had the most selfless and dedicated group helping me. You know, you had to do your best under those conditions. They really deserved it in every way.

Other Campaign Techniques

Shirpser: Then, the matchboxes. Now, that was my idea, and looking back I don't think it was a good one. I worked too hard in doing this. The matchboxes were packed about fifty to a box. Every day, in some part of the day, I would go to a small grocery store, a small drugstore, or a gas station, wherever I was driving by, and I'd get out and hand the owner a box of matches. I'd say, "Will you put this on your counter and let people pick them up?"

Shirpsen: There was a picture of me on the matchbox cover, which flattered me, and which I liked, of course! My name was in good-sized type, as candidate running for the assembly. It was in blue and white, which was my color scheme. I gave out over 50,000 matches in boxes of fifty. I worked at that every single day. Sometimes I'd only get to three or four places. Most of the time I'd get a cordial reception. Sometimes they'd even introduce me to their customers. Occasionally I'd find some hostility. One grocer said, he didn't drink or smoke, so he would not have matches on his counter. I noticed he sold cigarettes, however. Most of the time people were glad to have me.

I do believe I reached a lot of people that way. If they had the matchbox in their pocket--or so I figured--and somebody was smoking, or a gentleman wanted to light a lady's cigarette, he'd pull a matchbox out of his pocket and there was my picture. Maybe the other person would say, "Who's that?" and he'd say, "That's Clara Shirpsen who's running for the assembly."

I had to do all these things, because I couldn't get the needed publicity in the newspapers; I couldn't rent billboards. So we had to think of other things to do.

I was interviewed on radio two or three times, and on TV once, and we paid for spot announcements, too. The fire chief in Berkeley was very receptive to my campaign, and he said, "Do you want to go around and meet the boys in the fire stations? If you do, I'll take you." He said, "I've done that for Tom. I'll do it for you, too." That really was an experience, because I'd go into the fire houses, and the firemen would usually have a coffee pot heating, and I'd sit down, we'd have a cup of coffee together. I was invited to stay for lunch two or three times, when I was there late in the mornings, and they were good lunches, too! And then the postman often dropped by for a cup of coffee--and I'd meet him, too.

Chall: In your office?

Shirpsen: No, in the fire stations. So, the chief gave me a list of fire stations, and when he couldn't come, he would send somebody else to introduce me. I made the rounds of every fire station in my district! I'm sure I got a lot of support among the firemen. Of course, two or three times the alarm bell rang, and I'd be terribly startled by the loud ringing from the loud noise of that big bell. You really can hardly hear for about ten minutes

Shirpser: afterwards. And the big truck roared out, and everybody jumped on. When that happened, I was really sort of shook up. [Laughs] But it didn't happen too often.

Well, those are some of the things I remember doing.

Chall: It seems to me that you had a great deal of basic knowledge of campaign techniques, and I'm wondering where you picked this up?

Shirpser: Perhaps because I was so active in the League of Women Voters I was cognizant of what other candidates did. But I did many things nobody had ever done before, so I think most of it came through planning and discussion. I brought up the idea of the matchboxes, which I thought then was a good idea, and that didn't cost much. I do think it was one of my best campaign techniques, although I wouldn't recommend it to any one else, because it's a terribly exhausting project.

Chall: Yes, you really need someone to go around and do it for you.

Shirpser: But then it isn't as effective, you see. That's how I met many people. Because if you go into a store yourself, or if I was stopping for gas... For instance, I'd make it a point to go to different stations. And I'd give them a box and tell them who I was, and they'd hand them out for me. I'd tried to do it with as little effort as possible, but it was a big job.

Joining Helen Gahagan Douglas

Shirpser: Helen Gahagan Douglas was running for the United States Senate, during the time I was running for the assembly. Of course, she was one of my heroines, and I learned so much from her. Whenever she was in my district, I campaigned with her. She would always make a wonderful introduction of me, and urge people to support me. I admired the way she handled herself, her intelligence, and charm, and poise. She was really a model for me, and I worked for her election as hard as I knew how.

Chall: Did you have the time?

Shirpser: I would urge people, when I was talking to them, to vote for her. Whenever I had a chance and it was appropriate, I would say, "And I'm wholeheartedly supporting Helen Gahagan Douglas,

Shirpser: who's running for the U.S. Senate against Richard Nixon, and I hope you will support her." She was in the district at least three times in the primary and again in the general election. Once we had a great big rally for her in the Berkeley High School Auditorium, and we had a big crowd. I had the privilege of introducing her, and she made a great speech.

But, this one time I want to tell you about: We had this street meeting (and we had police permission) for Helen at the corner of University and San Pablo Avenue, which is widely traveled and has heavy traffic. Helen spoke first, and then I spoke. Afterwards, I was told by several people who were still making their way to their cars, that Richard Nixon got on our platform. It was a small platform that we had built there. He said, "I've been sitting in a car at this corner," (we had loudspeakers, of course) "and I heard every word that these two women said, and I urge you as a first order of business to defeat these two radical women."

Chall: Oh, is that right.

Shirpser: I thought this was in very bad taste, and his typical knife-in-the-back tactics. If he couldn't do anything more constructive for his own campaign than to say, "the first order of business is to beat these two women," I thought this was contemptible and destructive. I spoke of this, too, afterwards in my own speeches.

Chall: How did you use it?

Shirpser: I would say, "I think you must recognize the kind of destructive campaigning against Helen Gahagan Douglas being waged by Richard Nixon." And I told them the story of what happened. And nobody ever took me to task for it, so evidently he was there, and he did say that. Of course the "radical" label was completely untrue. Neither Helen nor I had participated in "radical" projects. We were sincere liberals in our philosophy.

Chall: How was Mrs. Douglas faring under this kind of attack? In the general election, she'd been attacked all the way through as a radical.

Shirpser: He defeated her, and wrecked her political career by the unfounded allegations he used against her.

Chall: And the newspapers in this area were not supporting her?

Shirpser: No.

Chall: How was she taking this? Did she feel that she was fighting a losing battle?

Shirpser: At the end I'm sure she knew it. It really was heart-breaking what he did to her, because when she got through with this campaign, she had been discredited and so unjustly. She had been one of the finest congresswomen we've ever had.

I once asked India Edwards about getting Helen an appointment after her defeat by Nixon, because one of Helen's interests was foreign policy, and she had served in the General Assembly [of the UN] as a delegate from Congress. I said, "How is it, India, knowing your closeness to Helen, and how much you admired and helped her--why haven't you gotten her an appointment, particularly, in the foreign-policy field?" She said, "Clara, I couldn't get Helen an appointment as dog catcher, with the mood in the United States Senate today, after what Richard Nixon did to her."

Oh, there are so many terrible things I could tell you that he did to her in that campaign and yet, he got elected while using those unjust tactics--then, and again in his future campaigns. Helen ended with a campaign deficit, and she had to work hard to make it up, and she left public life, and we were deprived of her great ability! Of course, to some extent, Richard Nixon did the same thing to Jerry Voorhies, when he campaigned against him in Nixon's first campaign for Congress.

Chall: What about the campaign between Earl Warren and Jimmy Roosevelt during the primary--I guess it was during both the primary and general election? Were you involved in any way with that campaign?

Shirpser: I did join his campaign whenever Jimmy was in the area. Later, when we get to my national committee post, you'll see that I went all-out trying to help him at one crucial point. But I didn't know him well in those days. This was a brand new experience for me, and only when he was in the district was I able to join with his campaign. He always was very cordial and cooperative. If I had been free, I would have helped him far more, but I had my own problems in my own campaign.

Hats and Other Related Matters in a Woman's Campaign

Shirpser: Can I tell you a funny story about a hat? I made a speech at that institute at the University of California, called "Politics, the People's Business," and then when I ran for the assembly, which was about a year later, several young people, University students, who were still on campus, and had been at the institute called me and offered to help, and of course, I was delighted. A young man gave me his name and said he'd always remembered me since that institute. I thought, "I must have been pretty good that day, if he still remembered me a year later." He said, "Do you know what I remember best about you?" And I said, "No, but I'd like to hear it"--thinking I'd really made an impression, talking about the issues, and so forth. He said, "You had on the cutest hat I ever saw!" [Laughter] So, you wonder sometimes; here's a University graduate, and the thing he remembered about me was that I had on "the cutest hat he ever saw." So I wore the "cutest hats" that I could buy from there on. I'd learned a new campaign technique. So, you see, you do learn. [Laughter]

You asked me once, if it made any difference if I were a woman, campaigning. I think it is definitely a handicap. I can't help but believe that. While I had wonderful support from women who had time to campaign for me, I did run into something that made me think that lots of women thought I should have stayed home and taken care of my family, and that it was unfair to my husband and to my child, and that women's place is in the home; you know--that sort of feeling. Every once in a while, I detected a little jealousy, which was disturbing to me. Unfortunately, I think it is true, from the local, the state, to the national level--if you're a person who does things, you do incur the jealousy of some women.

Chall: If you're a woman who does things?

Shirpser: If you're a woman, yes, there's often a resentment from other women. One of the things that I remember, which isn't quite in connection, but it shows the derogatory implication of politics, which is part of the feeling of women--that women shouldn't run for political office because it's a dirty game where you "wallow in the gutter." To me this is a terrible attitude. Politics enters your life every day in everything that you do. In one speech that I later gave at every opportunity I said that you couldn't escape being in politics. It enters into your life from the minute you get up in the morning until

Shirpser: the minute you go to bed at night, and I had many examples to prove it.

This woman friend lived in the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco and she was a superficial person--she chiefly liked to play bridge; that was our real point of contact, and she played a good game. Well, it came to me, through three or four mutual friends, that she was saying after I became Democratic National Committeewoman for California, "I didn't think Clara would go into politics!" You know, as if this was the most awful and sordid thing you could do, instead of realizing what a great honor this was, and the opportunity for accomplishment this high office gave me. One day, I was waiting in front of the Fairmont Hotel under the portico. (This isn't really appropriate to my assembly campaign, but sometimes when you think of things, it's best to say them because you might forget them.) She came out of the hotel and we started to talk, and she said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "Oh, I'm waiting for a friend to arrive. He's coming in at the airport, and another friend's meeting him and bringing him here." So, we chatted, and then, the car arrived, and out stepped Averell Harriman. He came up to me and said, "Hello, Clara. It's so good to see you again," and he gave me a big hug and kiss.

Over his shoulder, I saw my friend standing there with her mouth hanging open, because Averell Harriman was distinguished, and social, and wealthy, and it's fine to be in politics if he kisses you and hugs you, and maybe there is something good to being in politics after all, according to her expression! [Laughter]

This is one of the rewards--your opportunity to know people like Averell Harriman. In fact, I was his hostess that night at dinner, in Averell's honor. It was wonderful to know him, and to have his confidence, and to share common interests and beliefs. This is one of the good things of politics: if you do worthwhile and productive things, you do get to know distinguished people who also are doers.

In talking about women in politics, that's a whole subject I guess we ought to talk about more fully at another time. I wish that women would really support women candidates.

Chall: Yes, and we'll probably be talking about it from time to time. But you felt then, because you were rather unique in Berkeley as a politician, that there was some uncertainty about your role as a woman?

Shirpser: Yes, it was pioneering. There's no doubt about that. And I had to overcome a lot of the feeling that this was something I shouldn't be doing, that there were better places to put my time and energy. In my belief, there certainly were not.

In Defeat, an Assessment of Political Strength and Strategy

Shirpser: Then, I'd like to tell you a little about the last night before the general election, because my committee got together what they laughingly called "a banquet" at the University of California's YWCA--I think it was a box supper. But, it was a sell-out crowd. I think they charged \$1.50--just the cost of it--they just wanted this big rally for me that night before the election.

There were hundreds of people there, mostly young people, standing around the edges, and one person after another got up and said wonderful things about me. It was a very emotional experience for me, because they were looking at me with such devotion, and such confidence, and such belief in me, and I knew I couldn't win. They said that all felt it was such a worthwhile experience, and the expression on their faces is something I wish I could have recaptured, because it was truly a memorable occasion for me, one of my best.

When I got up to speak and tried to thank them, I was so touched and emotional, and exhausted, I started to cry! I really had a hard time controlling myself, and I think they realized why I had broken down. I assured them that these were tears of joy because of what they had done for me, and whether we won or lost, it had been a wonderful experience for me, and I thanked them over and over for their enthusiastic support and hard work.

Chall: Do you think that this was the beginning of a movement within the Democratic party for new policies and new leaders; was this one of the reasons why you were able to get the younger people to come?

Shirpser: I hope so. I felt that the result, while it wasn't a victory, was that we had accomplished something worthwhile. That's what I said to a seminar of Peter Odegard's graduate students. They wanted to talk to me after I had lost, and wanted me to evaluate my experiences for them, and to give them the opportunity to

Shirpsen: question me. I kept telling them the positive things I had thought emerged from my campaign. One of them said to me, "Well, this is all very well, but, on the other hand, you lost. These ideals, these constructive things you tried to do, didn't accomplish much, did they, because you lost." I answered: "I think this is a wrong attitude on your part. You can't always win at everything you do, and I do think I paved the way for the next Democratic candidate to win, and I did talk sense to the voters and explained the issues."

I had hoped I did, but then the district was gerrymandered, and we lost a lot of the Democratic area. That was during Earl Warren's regime. Even the Berkeley City Council was opposed to that gerrymandering. But the new district had a long tail extending far out, so it wasn't a compact and contiguous area--that's the official language--and we lost a lot of Democratic voters. So it became harder and harder to elect a Democrat in that district. I think it was about twenty years later before Ken Meade, a Democrat, got elected to the assembly.

But, I do think I paved the way for more participation and more club organizations; and people who had worked in my campaign did work on other campaigns, too. You know, it was impossible to beat Tom Caldecott. Something else that evolved from this, which is quite interesting, I think, and it was used in the newspapers a lot. It was just a small assembly race, after all, and yet two years later, Tom Caldecott was state chairman of the Republican party, and I was Democratic National Committeewoman for California. That was really quite exceptional--that we each went on to significant leadership posts in our respective parties.

We set a campaign model for people--and we didn't end enemies; we ended friends. We shook hands, and I congratulated him and wished him success, and I think probably my campaign made him a little more receptive to a liberal point of view. There are so many hidden benefits in a campaign like this, that you just can't base it only on whether you win or lose.

Chall: Maybe the fact that the area was gerrymandered was an indication that there was strength here.

Shirpsen: Definitely. A big part of the Democratic area was cut out of the Eighteenth Assembly District, and this assured Tom Caldecott of reelection as long as he wanted to stay in the assembly. He continued for several more terms, I believe.

Chall: Can you remember by how many votes you lost the general election--was it a very major loss?

Shirpser: Well, I'm guessing, because I'm not positive, and I haven't been able to find out, but I think it was something like 30,000 for Caldecott and 20,000 for me.

In the primary, while I won the Democratic nomination, it was very close. There were only a few hundred vote plurality for us. The way they counted those votes at the Oakland City Hall filled me with consternation. They wouldn't let me in, at first, to the room where the ballots were being tabulated. I said, "I have a right to watch," and they finally allowed me to go in. You know, they counted the ballots by hand at that time. What they did was--as the tabulations came--they put it in front of a magnifying lens, and they then flashed it on a screen, opposite them, and then they copied the results. I corrected at least a dozen ballots in about a half hour. I walked out of there disgusted, and the atmosphere was getting hostile. I was afraid there'd be a fight if I stayed in there any longer. They would take a 7 [vote tally] for me and list it as a 1. Or they would take an 8, that looks like a 3, you know--it was blurry--and I would demand to see the ballot. The mistakes were often made against me, at least when I was watching. I won by such a small margin in the primary election that I feel if I hadn't been there for about a half hour and sent somebody else in after I left to represent me, I might not have won, even the Democratic ballot! Because it was disturbing how many mistakes were made--and nobody was cross-checking! Whoever was doing it would flash numbers on the screen and somebody else was writing it down. Nobody was checking. It was just in the hands of the person writing down the result how they were going to interpret it. That's been cleaned up, and checking is now done.

Chall: That's pretty primitive.

Shirpser: I went to the Board of Supervisors meeting and protested this unfair tabulating, and from then on they had a checker, and finally they evolved a more systematic way of doing it. Byron Rumford said when he ran for the state senate just a few years ago, that it was the same thing: that he saw ballot after ballot that had errors on it, and they wouldn't correct them.

That was, of course, years later, and I'd hoped it would be better after my campaign.

Chall: Well, now it's counted by machine.

Chall: Can you tell me about your personal handling of the campaign? A candidate can become fatigued and ill, and the voice gives out, and he or she has to be calm, and kindly, and friendly, and fresh. How did you manage to do this?

Shirpser: If you looked ahead a week, you'd just stay in bed! You know you wouldn't have the stamina to get up again. You take it one day at a time, and if you believe what you're doing is sufficiently important, you just simply give up everything else. Toward the end of the campaign we ate out every night. I couldn't be home cooking. The telephone is another scourge. It rings when you're eating dinner, when you're eating lunch, before you're awake, late at night after you've gone to sleep. It's a very hard thing to live with. You've really got to believe in what you are doing. If you're an amateur, as I was, and go into politics, you've got to devote full time to it. There were sixteen to eighteen-hour days sometimes.

You've got to keep yourself abreast of what's going on. You've got to look at a newspaper once in a while, or listen to the radio. While your friends and committee members do try to keep you abreast of things, it's got to be very much in the hands of the candidate, unless you have a paid staff of professionals, who pave the way for you. Then it must be far easier. But, when you're doing it on your own with volunteers, it is a killing job.

I went away after the primary for two weeks to a small vacation resort where no one but Ad and close family knew where I was. I just stayed in bed until noon every day, and staggered up to occasionally write a letter, take a walk, and just not think. I was in a state of almost collapse each time.

Chall: It's total exhaustion.

Shirpser: It was total exhaustion, and as you look back, you just wonder how you did it. I just can't believe I did what I did, now.
[Laughs]

Chall: And your husband supported you all the way?

Shirpser: He really was remarkable. This is one of the main things a woman in politics must have--a cooperative husband, who will encourage you, who will share it with you. He took me to meetings, he cared, he discussed with me all the things that

Shirpser: were involved in it. It's a really great self-sacrifice on the part of the husband. He was remarkable all through my political career. He always encouraged me to do everything I thought I should do, and he had a great sense of pride in what I did.

Later, after he died three years ago, I must have had a dozen letters from friends who told me that one of Ad's most endearing qualities was his pride in me. When I wasn't there, he would take them into our den, where all these political pictures were on the wall, and open my scrapbooks, and talk to them about it. Many men find it very difficult to have their wives in the limelight, which is true when you're a candidate or hold a national committee post. Ad had no sense of inferiority about this. He shared everything with me, and this is one of my most treasured memories--that I shared everything with him, too. Everything that was affecting me affected him and vice versa; it draws you closer in many ways, living through excitement, and frustration, and some joy, some sorrows.

My daughter was married and not living in Berkeley; she lived in Menlo Park. So she wasn't able to help and she was pregnant. She couldn't take part in the campaign, but she was very interested, of course.

Chall: So, it was just the two of you and he did support you all the way.

Shirpser: I just don't know adjectives to express how much he did and the spirit in which he did it. I'm sure I couldn't have done what I did without him.

Chall: I wanted to know, too, about your relationships with those who were close to you in the campaign--your advisors. Was there any division of feeling among them? Did they also have their own differences of opinion which you had to mediate?

Shirpser: Oh yes. Of course. For instance, Professor Joseph Harris-- I valued his advice tremendously, because he was one of our most effective political science professors, and he had participated strongly in Laurance Cross's campaign for mayor. This preceded mine, and I was very active in that campaign. So that gave me many ideas too, and the benefit of his experience.

But, there was often division of thought. We had some very spirited discussions. But you learn to be as objective as you

Shirpsen: can, and to evaluate what they say. Sometimes, businessmen would represent a more business-oriented point of view than University professors would; and perhaps in the field of education, a professor would feel much more strongly about what he advocated than someone who was an attorney. And so it went.

But in the final analysis, as I remember it, I was pressured very little. They would all tell me what they thought, and they would hope to influence me, and I would do my best to be influenced by them; and of course I was, on many occasions. I didn't lose one single person on my committees as far as I know, and I think at the end I may have had, oh, three or four hundred sponsors in a full-page and in the Gazette. It was a tremendously broad cross-section of the district.

Chall: But your close advisors didn't have a falling out, either with you or among themselves?

Shirpsen: No. There were many differences of opinion, but we resolved them amiably.

Chall: Who was Mrs. Badger [Chester]?

Shirpsen: Well, Mrs. Badger was a very prominent Republican who had held several party offices, and I had known her through civic committees on which we had served together. The day after election, she called me, and she said, "I'm worried that you feel defeated." And I said, "Well, of course, I was defeated." And she said, "Not really. I worked for your opponent through the whole campaign, but all during that campaign, I did not hear one derogatory word about you. In fact, I'd be proud to have my friends say about me, what your opponents said about you." I thought that was the most wonderful and kind tribute--to come from a member of the Republican party, who was supporting my opponent, and yet she worried that I would feel depressed and defeated, and she wanted to make me feel better. I thought, now that is the sort of thing that you hope that women might do for each other. It really meant a great deal to me.

Then I got many letters from labor leaders, and one of them I remember particularly. It was from Frank Pellet, who was state head of the Railroad Brotherhood of Trainmen, and he wrote some very wonderful things about what I had done in the campaign. The he wrote, "I want to tell you that I would rather go down to defeat with a fine candidate like you, than win with your opponent." I thought again this was a wonderful thing to say,

Shirpsen: because after you've lost, people are not so likely to care as when you have a chance of winning. So those two calls and letters stand out in my mind as wonderful bonuses for having campaigned.

Chall: One last question. This was your first campaign for partisan political office. You had helped Laurance Cross. That again was nonpartisan. And you got to know the members of the County Democratic Central Committee and other partisan political activists. You mentioned at one time how cynically they considered your refusal of the billboards. Did you get other ideas about how partisan politics are actually handled from this campaign that upset you?

Shirpsen: Yes, I think in those days, the party was a pretty closed affair. It's improved remarkably in these years. One of the reasons for the improvement was, I think, "my baby," the organizing of the California Democratic Council. These Democratic clubs encouraged the participation of people at the grass-roots level, which wasn't done before, or if it was done, it was done in such an ineffective manner that people felt rejected instead of welcomed. I think that I served on the Alameda County Central Committee for about six to eight years.

Chall: Well, I'll discuss that with you, probably next time.

Shirpsen: And the state central committee. But I think there has been improvement, definite improvement, because more and more people run for county committee. They knew it was sort of a closed race, because the incumbents got reelected time after time. This didn't encourage people to run. In fact, when I ran for it, I was scared to death I was going to be defeated. It wasn't considered good form to campaign, or to send out literature, or to have a slate, or anything of that sort. I was told, you just don't do that.

Chall: That was not considered good form, or was it not permitted?

Shirpsen: There's no reason you couldn't write or call people asking them to vote for you, but I was told by the chairman and members of the committee, "It will be resented. It will boomerang. You're not supposed to run for the county committee. You're supposed to put your name on the ballot, and if you win, fine, and if you don't, you don't." Well, that way the incumbents get in every time.

- Shirpser: Naturally, my name was known, and so I got elected, but I could well have been defeated. Because I was told I mustn't campaign, so only passing the word-of-mouth among friends was the only thing I could do. I think that's a very stupid system and it doesn't encourage the best-qualified people to run.
- Chall: What about the attitude of the Democrats and maybe the Republicans also, whom you met while you were campaigning, toward the discussion of issues? Are issues really important in a campaign, or is it just a matter of getting in there and getting your name known?
- Shirpser: I was an issue-oriented person.
- Chall: Was that generally accepted as the thing to do as a campaigner?
- Shirpser: I don't know. It depends on the person who's campaigning. I think it does. Again, I refer to Adlai saying "Talk sense to the people." If you're not running with some definite objectives in view beyond getting elected, I don't see why you should be elected. You've got to say what you stand for.
- Chall: You thought that, but what about the people around you who were members of the central committee at the time?
- Shirpser: I frankly didn't have too much contact with them. They gave me very little help in any way. I don't know whether the County Central Committee met the whole time I was running for office. It was an ineffective group. Now, they meet. They meet regularly. [Laughter] But in those days, I sometimes called the chairman, saying, "What do you think I should do in this case?" Most of the answers were so vague I just went on and did what I thought I should.

Many people do run on their record as incumbents. Seventy-five percent of all incumbents got reelected. They didn't have to work very hard. Now they do because cross-filing's out and at least you get some party support that you didn't previously have. But I had a very dim view of that County Central Committee.

III THE MOVE INTO CALIFORNIA STATE POLITICS, 1950-1952
(Interview 3, June 15, 1972)

The Democratic State Central Committee

Chall: I thought we'd start talking today about your appointment to the State Central Committee--in 1950 I think that was.

Shirpser: Yes.

Chall: Now, that's an automatic appointment because you won your primary.

Shirpser: Yes, and you become what's called "a nominee" of your party, and you represent the assembly district, which was the eighteenth for me. This includes you in all the meetings and functions and policy-making groups. I'm distressed that I have to say that I think it was an ineffective group, as I think the County Central Committee was.

In those days, it was mostly ceremonial. According to the law, you met every two years in Sacramento. One of the chief functions was to adopt a party platform. A widely based committee met, and they put together a very good platform, but I don't believe that much attention was paid to it after it was adopted. There often was a big fight on the floor over various policy planks, but when it did come out...I found two or three, one from 1950, one from 1954, and the language is excellent and the content, too.

The important function is to choose the party officers, and it's a real power struggle. There's a great deal of lobbying that goes on. I think the effectiveness of the State Central Committee is chiefly due to the man who is chosen the state chairman. If he's a strong capable person who is willing to do

Shirpser: hard work, he can make it count. If he just likes to be state chairman, and have all the privileges of that role, and delegates a good deal of responsibility, which often isn't carried out, then it really doesn't amount to very much.

The way it's done is this: Each person who is a party official appoints members to the State Central Committee. We had a slate in 1950, where James Roosevelt was running for governor, Pat Brown for attorney general, Helen Gahagan Douglas for the United States Senate; we had seventeen congressmen or nominees, we had fifty-five legislators--that is, eight for the state senate and forty-seven for the assembly--that includes both legislators and nominees of the party. We didn't have wide representation in the legislature at that point. We had one Democrat running for the State Board of Equalization. There are ten State Central Committee officials, such as chairman, and vice-chairman--three vice-chairmen--secretary, treasurer, and so on.

Chall: How did all these people--the last group you mentioned, the State Central Committee officers--how did they get on the State Central Committee in the first place?

Shirpser: Well, this is the way you do it: for instance, as nominee of the party, I was a member and a delegate, and I also had three appointments. I, being a woman, had one woman appointment and two men.

Chall: Is that a requirement?

Shirpser: Yes, that's the way it goes. And the man member will appoint one man and two women. So this was one of the few bodies where there was equal representation for women, because that was written into the law.

So, I figured out there were roughly, between 350 and 400 people. Now, today, there are a lot more, because, you see, cross-filing having been abolished, anyone who runs for the Democratic nomination is going to either win or be a nominee. So, it's a much bigger body today. But, I was very disappointed in the lack of influence anyone seemed to have there.

For instance, one time, Jack Tolan was interested in being state chairman. He would have been a wonderful state chairman. He had all the background of experience, capability, and education, and he was nominated by one very well-known congressman,

Shirpser: seconded by another, and one of the top Democrats in the state spoke for him, and I did my best to help him. A rumor was started that he was antagonistic, or prejudiced, to Negroes. Nothing could have been further from the truth! Yet a rumor like that, which was spread around, was enough to hurt him, so he withdrew. He was one of the people who'd done most in equal housing for minorities. He opened that whole area in Richmond, in which I bought a duplex because I thought it was so excellent. There was no discrimination, no quotas for minorities. This was one of the first equal housing developments in the whole United States, and Jack was given a national honor for doing this, and yet the rumor-mongers effectively discredited him.

There was a great power struggle for these offices. I really couldn't understand why, because they didn't carry that much power. But it was my first experience with how much people wanted those offices, then after they'd got them, how little they did with them.

For instance, the State Central Committee people don't meet often. Perhaps they don't meet at all. I don't remember being called to a meeting between the two conventions. Of course, they should be much more effective; in fact, it was the ineffectiveness of both these bodies that, later (when I came to be national committeewoman) started me forming all these clubs all over the state at the grass-roots level. It was the only way I knew how to build a party and I started there. Some people laughed at me and said, "You're not in the League of Women Voters now," but I didn't know any other way to get more effectiveness into the party, and to make people know they were needed, and wanted, and to give them jobs to do.

An example to show you how the conventions were conducted: I was invited to a luncheon meeting of the legislators. As a nominee, I was asked to go. I listened and was very interested in what they had to say about platform and what their objectives were, and I thought, "It's going to be a good convention."

Chall: Now, I'd just like to clear up the word "convention" here. This is a convention of the State Democratic Central Committee. It has nothing to do with national politics or anything of this kind?

Shirpser: Oh no.

Chall: So, you said the convention meets occasionally?

Shirpser: Every two years. And the convention was held at Sacramento, August 5, 1950. It's always held after the primary and after the national convention, because then you know who the national committee members are. You see, the two national committee members were also listed among the officers. That was in 1950. In 1954, under a different chairman, the national committee members were never mentioned any place in the platform.

So, I went to this meeting of the legislators, and I was being quiet and listening, until someone made an impassioned speech about the necessity for the legislators to control the coming convention. There were enough of them so they could control and accomplish the things they needed to do; and the way to do that was to appoint people as your delegates who would listen to you, who would be influenced by you, and who would do what you told them to do. There wasn't one word said about qualifications.

So I listened as long as I could, and then I put my hand up. I know I was very naive in what I said, but I felt it needed to be said. I did it deliberately. I said, "I'm afraid you're going to be very disappointed in my appointees. Before I heard you and found out what your objectives are, I appointed the three people I thought would be able to do the most for the State Central Committee, in terms of ability, and intelligence, and experience, and I wouldn't presume to tell them what to do. I would assume they would listen to my point of view. And it would carry some weight, but I wouldn't dream of telling them, 'Vote for this one, or don't vote for that one.' This is not the way I understood the State Central Committee functioned."

Well, there was complete silence and consternation. People looked at me with such wonderment that I could almost hear them saying in their minds, "How the hell did this maverick wander into the fold? What are we going to do with her?" This was the way I thought I should function.

At this point, I'd like to evaluate what being an amateur in politics can mean. Now, it has a great many handicaps. You have to start from scratch. There's practically no place you can go to get the kind of research that you need. I had to discuss with different people who knew a great deal more about politics than I, how I should conduct myself.

Chall: And who were some of these people?

Shirpser: Well, there was Professor Harris, for one, who was a professor in the political science department. There was Peter Odegard, who was head of the political science department. There was Jack Tolan, whose father had been our congressman and who had been his administrative assistant in Washington, D.C., and had filled several government posts. There was one of my appointees to the State Central Committee, Rex Nicholson, who had been in the Department of the Interior in Washington and was one of our most prominent, successful businessmen. There was Jeff Cohelan, who was my other appointee, who as you know went on to be our congressman, who was a representative of labor, one of the men that labor valued. He'd been a Rhodes Scholar, he was extremely intelligent and able. Those are my two men appointees, Rex and Jeff. My woman appointee was Minnie Lou Eakin, who had held just about every office in the Democratic party, at the local or area level, and who had been wonderfully helpful to me in organizing women, in raising funds, and I knew she would do a good job.

Chall: Did they advise you? Could these people give you the kind of advice that you needed?

Shirpser: Yes, on many things. I think I was more liberal in my point of view than Rex or Minnie Lou. But they knew that this was my thinking, and Rex had been one of my sponsors, and had been most helpful to me in my campaign. So were Jeff and Minnie Lou. So they knew what I stood for, and they really believed in my sincerity. Sometimes they thought I was naive, and I realize now that I was.

One of the handicaps is that you don't have sufficient party experience, but, on the other hand, a great asset is that you have not yet become cynical, and if you think something needs to be done, you go out and try to do it. Often people would look at me in amazement and say, "But you can't do that!" And I'd say, "I think it needs to be done; I'm going to try." Sometimes I did accomplish what "couldn't be done."

I think it is important too--if you bring new people in, who have had experience with other organizational work. They are not likely to be as frustrated as people who have gone through the mill year after year and seen that they can't do what they want to do and so don't even try.

Chall: Why can't people do what they want to do? What prevents change from taking place in party structure?

Shirpser: As an example of this: Instead of appointing the people who they thought could do most for the State Central Committee, in between the conventions, to formulate organization, and policies, and so on between state conventions, these people--the legislators--wanted to appoint people who would go along and do what they were told to do; who would vote for the people they wanted them to vote for; who would raise funds, which is another very important thing. The importance of money in politics is another subject I want to get into later, because I think it's one of the greatest dangers to democracy and it grows worse each time we have an election.

So, this was typical of the pragmatic, experienced politicians. If you wanted to control the convention, you appoint the people who would do what they're told to do.

Chall: And the state convention is supposed to choose the platform and provide the people who will then be the party leaders the following year?

Shirpser: Yes, to elect the officers and to help with campaigns. This is another sample of ineffectiveness: When I was running for the assembly, the Northern California woman's chairman was someone I had not known until I had plunged into politics, but we were very friendly, liked each other--

Chall: What was her name?

Shirpser: Well, I think I won't say, because of what I'm not going to relate. She was a capable and good person. But here I was, one of the few women statewide, running for political office, under tremendous odds, and obviously in need of funds. So, she sent out a letter--I don't know how many--she made some phone calls, and she sent me a check voluntarily, which was very nice. As I remember, the check was for about \$25. If the Northern California chairman of the Women's Division can't do more than that for a candidate whom she likes, and thinks should win and wants to help win, then obviously there's little effective organization, is there?

Chall: No, I agree.

Shirpser: Well, then Peg Gordon, you know, Mrs. Aaron R. Gordon, was congressional district co-chairman, and of course she was much more effective. It was her responsibility to help me, and she did it very capably. She had two meetings for me, which were

Shirpser: fund raising, among the women, and she produced over \$100 which, in terms of what the Northern California group did, against just a local assembly district, was quite a large sum. She spoke for me, and did a great many things to help me.

She had the same struggle locally that the Northern California chairman evidently was having--to get people organized when the State Central Committee isn't doing much in the way of functioning, and the county committee was doing practically nothing.

You're so busy with organization, you can't take as many speaking engagements, you never have any leisure to just sit and think and write good speeches. It's very difficult to be a candidate under those circumstances. I think it's all improved a great deal at every level, because the CDC, the California Democratic Council of Clubs, in my active years, was a strong force, and if the county committee didn't meet then the clubs took over; if the State Central Committee didn't function, then the clubs did. So, the county committees were challenged, and they did a much better job. I think probably the chairmen were more effective, did harder work because of the challenge of the clubs; they had to produce more. Certainly, in those days, there was much need for improvement.

The Power of the Chairman

Chall: You claimed that a great deal of the activity for the selection of the chairman and other officers was a power struggle. What was the power over--just having the job, or was it controlling votes in some form or another?

Shirpser: Yes, the state chairman has a great deal of power to use; if he uses it wisely, he can be very influential.

Chall: What kind of power?

Shirpser: Well, he could call the State Central Committee together in a body, or conference; he could set up organization within the State Central Committee, which would take responsibility in stated areas, and during the campaign, especially, would provide help to the nominees. They could raise funds, they could do

Shirpser: many productive things. But the power is in appointments. There aren't too many in California because so much is under civil service. In some states it's a very important function.

That's true of National Committee members too. Sometimes when several posts for appointments as judges are coming up, the national committeeman or committeewoman can write to the appropriate people and send the qualification of the applicants, explain why they're for them. Whenever the National Committee people are strong and effective, it does carry weight. You can often help people to run for office, for instance, to encourage them. We'd get a lot better candidates if we could furnish them with an organization and some funds. So, the state chairman can be a very important post, and very often it has been, when we've had good leadership.

Chall: Did you participate in some way in the Democratic women's organization?

Shirpser: It's part of the State Central Committee.

Chall: Who chooses these women who become Northern California state chairmen and Southern California state chairman for the Women's Division?

Shirpser: They were chosen at the State Central Committee convention. I remember trying very hard to elect Dorothy Donahoe, who was one of our assemblywomen, and she was willing to take the post, and she was extremely capable. She won, but there was strong competition. But she made it, and she was an excellent Northern California chairman, of the Women's Division.

Chall: In these Women's Divisions, women are supposed to work with other women primarily?

Shirpser: Yes.

Chall: Raise money, organize, set up clubs, know who the workers are? There's a power struggle, I take it, among the women too?

Shirpser: They have privileges as well as responsibilities. If you want publicity, you can get a good deal of it. You function with the executive committee. I haven't spoken of it previously, but that body is where most of the action is. I became a member of the executive committee when I was Democratic National Committeewoman. They do meet from time to time, when there is

Shirpser: something to be decided, such as the election of a national committeeman, which we'll get to later. They're the body which does the electing. The executive committee is statewide, like the Democratic National Committee is, nationally.

Chall: They function for the party.

Shirpser: In others words, the whole State Central Committee is an unwieldy group; there are hundreds of them to call together. I think there were seventy-five or more people on the executive committee. (We'd have to check.) There's a book of state rules.

Chall: Since that's unwieldy, would a smaller group be wheeling and dealing somewhere behind the scenes?

Shirpser: Oh, yes, of course. [Laughs] Before the meeting, my first indoctrination was from George Miller, who was state chairman. And here again, you see, is a pragmatic politician.

When I was organizing the clubs [CDC] (this will come later) he said to me once, "You're wasting your time and effort running all over the state. They'll fold up. Why are you spending your money and spending so much time organizing people? In six months there won't be any clubs functioning." Then he said to me--he had a favorite gesture; he put his left hand out and clenched his right hand, and he would emphasize each word, pounding his right fist into the palm of his other hand--"You've gotta have the votes. If you don't have the votes, you don't go to the meeting. You check before hand, you do your work, you get people to accept your point of view--then you go to the meeting. If you don't have the votes, you don't go to the meeting."

Chall: Which meeting was that?

Shirpser: Any political meeting. So I said, "I can't accept that. I've got to believe that if you go there with facts on issues, you can influence people's thinking." He said, "You're not in the League of Women Voters now."

You have to battle that kind of thinking all the time, if you're trying to do a job. He was speaking for the typical point of view of an experienced legislator and party official. You set up all the things you want ahead of time by talking to people, by convincing them you're right, by pressures if you have them, and then you go to the meeting because you can

Shirpsers: get what you want. If you don't have the votes, just don't waste your time. Don't go to the meeting. This I must admit seems to be fairly typical.

I really think we have covered what the State Central Committee was in those days, and certainly it's better now.

Chall: How do you know?

Shirpsers: I've been to enough meetings, and worked with enough of them to believe this to be true. I really think they're much more effective and hard-working, and they accomplish a lot more.

Delegate to the Democratic National Convention: The Truman Slate

Shirpsers: I think the next big thing in my political life was when President Truman decided to run for reelection in 1952. Early in the year, and I don't have the date, I was invited, as a nominee of the party for this district, to come to a committee meeting.

Chall: What committee would this have been?

Shirpsers: The Alameda County Central Committee chairman was the official one to call such a meeting--to choose delegates to the Democratic National Convention.

Chall: County delegates.

Shirpsers: Not county; they were chosen by assembly district and congressional district. I mean, within Alameda County. I naturally thought it would be a large, broadly based group, and when I got there, my memory tells me that there were, probably twenty to twenty-four people there, which is a very small number. I'm almost certain there weren't more than that.

As I looked around the room, I saw that a great many people were missing whom I thought should be there, and it did not seem to me broadly representative for as important a function as to choose the delegates to the national convention, supporting President Harry Truman.

Shirpsen: This is a long time ago--twenty years ago--so I've forgotten a great deal, but the thing I remember mostly was that the chairman, who was Monroe Friedman, who later became a judge--and still is a judge--was presiding. Byron Rumford, who was an assemblyman, nominated Monroe Friedman, which was a very logical thing to do, since Monroe was county chairman. I believe the nominations all were to come from the floor, and then we would vote. Then Monroe said he wanted to step down as chairman, and he asked Byron to take the chairman's gavel, and then Monroe nominated Bryon, who was sitting in the chair, at that point--sort of an "Alphonse & Gaston" interlude.

There really wasn't anything wrong about this. Obviously, Byron Rumford, as the only assemblyman around here at that time, should have been a delegate. But it seemed so obvious, you know. People there woke up to what was happening, and that if they wanted to get their nominations in, they'd better do it pretty quickly. I was nominated from the floor. When the nominations ended, we then voted, and I think I was the only woman chosen among the delegates to the national convention, so this put me on the Truman slate.

Not too long after that, a group from California formed to urge Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee to run for president and to enter the California primary. I'd been tremendously impressed with Estes from the first time I saw him on television as chairman of the Senate Investigation Committee.

This wasn't, as many people said later, just a ploy to get himself thrust into the national scene. He accomplished tremendous results. It took great courage--as I learned when I knew him later. His life was threatened, and his families' lives were threatened. He went to the source of crime, and as he did, he inevitably turned up some politicians who were working with the underworld. When he did, he exposed them. This brought him the undying enmity of President Truman, because some of his best friends, like Senator Scott Lucas of Illinois--there was a tie established between Senator Lucas and the underworld, which defeated him for the United States Senate. I'm sure that Estes used factual information. Then he came to California, and called Artie Samish, who had as I previously told you, complete control of most of the billboards, as one of his lobbying pressures. Estes was the first man who ever took on Artie Samish and exposed him and got the needed information, which ended with Artie Samish going to jail.

Shirpser: At that point, many of my friends were on the Kefauver delegation and wanted me to join them, and I wanted to do so. But I was committed to President Truman, and I certainly did not think it would be ethical for me to leave one delegation and go to another.

So, Estes entered the presidential primaries, and he won in the first primary in New Hampshire. Estes won with little organization and without adequate funds, but chiefly because of the way he campaigned, the way he went to the people whose trust and confidence he earned, the way he shook hands-- indefatigably--and the way he relentlessly pursued his goals. By "relentlessly," I mean no derogatory implication. It's just that he was dedicated to the fact that the people's voice should be heard in convention. And the only way he knew how to do this was to go to the people, through the primaries.

He and Nancy, his wife, who was a great asset, worked tirelessly in New Hampshire, and they captured the support of the people. Now, to run against the president of the United States, and in your first primary election to win so overwhelmingly, was a tremendous triumph for Estes.

Alternate to the Democratic National Convention: The Kefauver State

Shirpser: Then Mr. Truman withdrew, so I felt free to join the Kefauver delegation, which they had been asking me to do right along. But at that point, a great deal of the organizational work had been done, all of the delegates had been selected, so they could only offer me an alternate's post. This meant leaving a delegate's post with the Truman delegation, and I could only be an alternate on the Kefauver slate in California. But I believed in it so sincerely that I did join them and worked as hard as I knew how.

I didn't know Estes Kefauver then. But I remember the first meeting of the area delegation, which I attended. I was asked to speak, and tell them how I saw the delegation effort; any suggestions I had to make; what I thought the issues were, and so on. It was extemporaneous, but because of my previous experience running for the assembly, I had enough background there to speak adequately. I asked them how long they wanted

Shirpsen: me to talk. They said, "As long as you want to," so I said what I thought needed to be said. Later, a lot of people came up and said nice things to me. What happened following this meeting had a tremendous effect on my future life.

Early Consideration as National Committeewoman

Shirpsen: I had been introduced to Mr. Harley Hise, who was by far the most distinguished member of our delegation. He was a close personal friend of Estes Kefauver. Harley had been chairman of the RFC [Reconstruction Finance Corporation] in Washington for many years, and of course he had worked with Estes and had a high opinion of him. Harley came over to me, and I knew who he was, of course, and he said, "I'd like to talk to you very seriously about something." I said, "I'm delighted that you'd take the time to talk to me." He said, "I heard you tonight; I've looked over the delegation very carefully, and I want to offer you my support for Democratic National Committeewoman for California." Well, my knees gave way! I grabbed a chair and sat down and said, "I don't even know what a Democratic National Committeewoman does!" So he said, "It's the most important party post in the state of California, and I'm going to write Estes all about you, and I'm sure he will agree that you are the most qualified person."

I said, "Mr. Hise, I can't possibly get elected in this delegation. I know the local people, of course. But I don't know the delegates up and down the state, especially in Southern California. I haven't done anything for Estes up to this point. I hope to. You just don't realize what you're taking on." He said, "If I do the work--if I talk to people, if I support you and get other people to support you, will you then promise me you will run for national committeewoman and you won't withdraw? It's going to be a terribly tough fight, but I think you can make it."

So I said, "Well, if you think it's worthwhile to do all this, and you think I'm qualified to do it, I do promise." He said, "In my opinion you are by far the best qualified person on this delegation for this position. I've met with the North and South, and I think that I have enough judgment to make this choice, and I want to help you." I said, "Well, I'm overwhelmed by the enormity of what you're asking me to do, and I appreciate

Shirpser: your confidence in me and the honor. I don't want to campaign for it, though, because I don't want to be self-seeking. I didn't do that when I ran for the assembly, and I don't want to do it in this case because I have too many handicaps. I've come in late; I'm only an alternate, I'm not a delegate. I'm newly active in the Democratic party. I haven't had enough experience. It's only two years ago that I came actively into politics, and all of this will be used against me, undoubtedly."

Gertrude Clark was an announced candidate for Democratic National Committeewoman. She lived in Sutter Creek, which is way up north, a very small community. Harley pointed out that by living in the center of the population area, I could be effective here, whereas she would have to be traveling back and forth, and wouldn't do it often. She was over seventy-years old; I was not quite fifty. I had had a much wider community organizational experience than she had had, and I was younger, stronger, and I lived where the center of action was.

I couldn't see how I could possibly win, but if Harley felt it was important enough... Later I got a wonderful letter from Senator Kefauver, after I'd met him through Harley. He had heard what Harley thought. So I decided that I would make the effort.

The nominating convention was in Fresno--a couple of weeks later.

Chall: Could I go back to get some information? When Truman withdrew, that meant that entire delegation that had been set up for President Truman as a nominee, really was non-functioning?

Shirpser: No, I'm sorry I neglected to tell you this: Attorney General Pat Brown then became the head of the delegation--a favorite son delegation with Pat Brown as chairman of it. As far as I can remember, I was the only one who left the Truman slate. The rest who stayed were the most prominent Democrats in California, the big contributors, the party officials, the congressmen, the legislators, the county chairmen. It was really the "official" slate. We were the amateurs. When we talk about the campaign, which Senator Kefauver ran in California, I can't say strongly enough that he won that campaign. It was a campaign that was run with very little organization, very inadequate funds, very few well-known delegates on the Kefauver slate. That was one of the reasons they wanted me on the delegation, I'm sure, because I had

Shirpsen: recently won the primary election, and I was well known in my East Bay area. You know, the names of all the delegates were on the ballot.

Estes Kefauver: The Primary Campaign in California, 1952

Shirpsen: So, let me just tell you one or two things that happened in the Kefauver primary campaign in 1952. We planned the most man-killing schedule that I have ever seen handed to a candidate. How Senator Estes Kefauver survived it, I will never know. I kept saying, "No man can live through twelve to sixteen meetings a day, walking the streets in the financial district shaking hands with everybody, going to factories when the crews came out or when they went to work early in the morning, going to labor meetings, going to women's groups, "coffee klatches," holding TV interviews and press conferences." They answered, "Estes can take it. He's strong; that's the way he wins his campaigns--going to the people."

In my later and rather intensive experience for many years, working with many candidates, I never knew anyone who met people so well. Estes was warm, he was friendly, he liked people. He would go up to someone and say (he was tall, and he was handsome, and beautifully groomed always), "I'm Estes Kefauver, running for the presidency, and I hope you'll support me." I was trailing along with him, and would hear, "I'm for you, Senator." "I'm going to vote for you, Senator." "Nobody else ever came and shook my hand and said they want my vote. I'm going to vote for you." It was really quite overwhelming how well he met the people.

The clearest instance of this I think came to me at a large rally for him. It was an inexpensive box supper in the San Francisco Civic Auditorium. People were sitting at tables of ten to twelve. Then, at the head table on the platform were his delegates from the area, and whatever important people we could gather (who were few) and Estes. Everybody had a box supper; so Estes opened his and took two or three bites, and then he announced, "I'm going down to the floor and shake hands with everybody." This was at the end of a sixteen-hour day! And there were a thousand people sitting down there. I pleaded with him, "Please eat your dinner first and have a cup of coffee." He said, "No, the most important thing I have to do is go down

Shirpser: there and meet the people." I said, "You're going to fall down from exhaustion. I better get a doctor ready! You're never going to survive it." He said, "I'll survive it."

So, he went down, and at every table, someone introduced him to people at the various tables. I performed the introduction at several tables. He shook hands with every single one of more than a thousand people, said a few words to each of them and answered questions briefly on issues important to them. His information, the way he handled himself, was remarkable. After he finished, I said, "Well, should I get that doctor?" And he said, "No, Clara, I'm fine. Something comes to me from the people. I'm stronger now than when I went down and started shaking hands."

Chall: Now this campaign of Kefauver's in the primary was mostly Kefauver meeting the people. Television was a fairly new medium at the time. What about his relationships with the press, and his radio and television coverage? Was he followed around by press people; did he see them, if followed, and did he have a press group that handled relations with the media?

Shirpser: He was always newsworthy, and usually received good press treatment and invitations for news broadcasts or interviews. His press secretaries were rarely professionals; they were usually volunteers with some experience, because Estes just didn't have the funds to pay for professional press people. After the California primary, which, of course, is the big prize, more funds were available, but never, never nearly enough. In California, sometimes he was so desperate for funds, he didn't have enough money to pay his hotel bills until we would find more contributions. How little anyone else did for him! We all rode in on his coattails. Anyone in that delegation who says anything differently is very egotistical, because we didn't count. It was Estes who counted.

He was especially good on television. He had a presence, a poise. I have to say he was not a great speaker. His eloquence didn't come through at all. His speeches read so much better than they sounded, because he didn't have an effective delivery; he didn't have the funds to be trained as President Nixon was, as you so plainly read in The Selling of the President. He was effective in the sincerity he projected, and the great amount of information he divulged in the question periods. His liberal point of view was so exceptional for a senator from Tennessee, especially on civil rights and civil liberties.

Shirpsen: I think that most of all, though, his integrity, and the way he fought for what he believed was right, was what came through. I think, above everything, the people trusted him. This was a great asset in his favor wherever he went; when he said something you could believe it. You knew he meant it. And on television, when he had the question and answer periods, then he was great--really. We always urged him when he did have an occasional television program not to make much of a speech, but to devote the time to questions and answers, which were phoned in, or asked by a panel of reporters, because the vast amount of information he had was unbelievable.

Later, I attended committee hearings in Washington, D.C. and when I met his legal counsel in Washington, he told me that every committee meeting Estes ever had, whether it was consumer protection, or electoral reform, or crime investigation, that after Estes finished questioning the witnesses who were there, he would turn to his legal counsel and say, "Now you take over and ask them questions." The legal counsel usually had to say, "I've got nothing more to question them about. You've covered the whole field."

You know, Estes was Phi Beta Kappa; he was an extremely intelligent man. He worked his way all through college, working hard--shoveling coal furnaces--whatever was needed, and yet played sixty minutes of football--every single game. He was the only man at that time who'd ever done this; and yet was Phi Beta Kappa, too.

He had tremendous qualifications that people don't usually remember. We didn't talk about the coonskin cap and what that meant.

Chall: No.

Shirpsen: I loathed that coonskin cap. If ever I saw it around, I hid it. I couldn't bear to have him wear that coonskin cap, because then he became sort of a figure of fun in people's eyes. But it had a serious meaning, too.

You know, when he first ran for Congress, he took on Boss Crump in Tennessee, who was one of the most powerful political bosses who ever lived, and Boss Crump had his own candidate for Congress. Friends of Estes were at a meeting where Boss Crump was speaking for his candidate for Congress, and he said, "Who's this pet coon who thinks he's going to run against my

Shirpser: candidate and beat him?" referring to Estes. This was contemptible language to use against a man of Estes' ability. Estes had just been chosen as the outstanding man of the year in Tennessee by the Junior Chamber of Commerce.

Estes came to his own next political campaign meeting and when he spoke, he pulled a coonskin cap out of his pocket and put it on his head, and he said, "Well, Boss Crump says I'm a pet coon, but I sure am not Boss Crump's pet coon!" So, you see that coonskin cap became a symbol in Tennessee of independence, courage, of fighting political bosses, and of Estes' own integrity. So it meant something.

And eventually, knowing how I hated it, he sent me his original coonskin cap! [Laugh] In Tennessee the coonskin cap meant something, but nationwide--in California--I hid it all the time. Anytime somebody brought him one, as they often did, I would just confiscate it, if Estes weren't looking!

Chall: And he was willing not to wear it?

Shirpser: Yes; he put up with an awful lot from me. [Laughs] He knew my motives were good.

Chall: When he was in Northern California, you were with his campaign?

Shirpser: Just as one of the delegates at first. I didn't get to know him very well in the primary. I think if it hadn't been for Harley, who knew him well and had praised me so highly to him, I wouldn't have seen that much of him. But, while he never did get into the National Committee fight, I certainly had been given the feeling that he would be delighted if I became national committeewoman.

Chall: Who were his principal advisors in the California primary, that you can recall?

Shirpser: Harley Hise for one. George Miller, Jr., who was a state senator, and who went on to be chairman of his delegation; he was probably the best known in Northern California. Then John Anson Ford in Southern California, who was chairman of the Board of Supervisors of Los Angeles County--so he was a prominent person. A few had had political office, but the majority were not well known. Often, they were people who couldn't get on the regular party slate which had been pledged to Truman and had no other place to go, so they went to Kefauver. This isn't

Shirpser: meant to be derogatory, but it is true of many people. Joe de Silva, who was very prominent in labor circles--he was the head of the Retail Clerks Union statewide, based in Southern California; Tom Carrell, who went on to be an assemblyman and later chairman of Estes' 1956 primary election campaign. I don't mean to belittle our delegates; it's just that at that point, they weren't many who were well known. Among them, Lyle Cook, who was the nominee for the Seventh Congressional District, who's now a judge and with whom I ran my campaign when he ran for Congress. I have a good deal to tell you about Lyle, later.

But, there were some other well-known people. Glenn Harmon was a prominent attorney; he had been my treasurer in my assembly race and was one of the elders in the Mormon Church. There were undoubtedly others, but at this distance in time, I've forgotten their names.

Chall: Could you say that these were anti-establishment Democrats; that they went along with Kefauver because they were interested in his point of view?

Shirpser: Yes, I think that this was true.

Chall: They were liberals?

Shirpser: Yes, they were mostly liberals. But I think it wasn't so much anti-establishment as pro-Kefauver. Estes had glamor, a nationwide image, which had a tremendous effect on women particularly. They almost had to mount a guard in front of his room at night. He had a terrific effect on women. [Laughs]

I think people saw him--you know I'm being a little facetious--but you know the image as a "white knight," riding in and overturning crime, and political bosses, and standing for complete integrity. This is obviously an exaggeration, but that was part of it.

Chall: That was his general image?

Shirpser: Well, it was part of his image. I'm not willing to settle for that being his general image. I think his image was of intelligence, courageous integrity, and extremely broadly based information on the issues, of a liberal point of view, almost unbelievably so, knowing that he came from a southern state, Tennessee.

Shirpser: He pioneered in so many fields. This had not yet happened, but later, as United States Senator, he had one of the greatest records, and was chosen over and over again among the top five or ten senators by people like the American Political Science Association and many other prestigious groups--the Brookings Institution, and so on. Estes is very much underrated as to his great abilities. I have always tried to show that.

Chall: And the people here who were supporting him were various kinds of people, supporting him for various reasons, you would say?

Shirpser: Yes. Labor people, minority-group people; more women in our delegation, I believe, than almost any other that went to the convention, although it was way below fifty percent; some legislators.

Chall: What was the Pat Brown delegation doing in order to counteract the thrust of your campaign?

Shirpser: Well they brought out lots of prominent speakers from the East, and from Washington, D.C. It was a disadvantage not to have a presidential candidate heading it, but on the other hand, Pat Brown had been attorney general for some time then, and was very well known, and the delegates on that slate were extremely prominent. People began speaking for Adlai Stevenson for president and Adlai was out here and spoke at the Commonwealth Club and he was sensational! He made a great speech and it had tremendous repercussions all over the country. No one knew whether he was going to run; he kept saying he wasn't going to run.

The Pat Brown slate was uncommitted, and they were going back there, if they won, to speak for the state, which they more broadly represented, in terms of their own prestige, than we did. But Estes beat them--better than two to one! He won every county in the state of California--fifty-eight of them! He got more votes than Earl Warren, who was heading the Republican ticket. It was simply tremendous, this victory! So, of course, we had every confidence that he was going to get the nomination.

You know, he won eleven primaries out of fourteen which were then listed. He was the only man in the history of this country who ever did that. Now, for instance, I read that to date McGovern has won nine, and with New York, it could be ten. Estes won these without organization, without adequate funds. McGovern

Shirpser: had the best organization I have ever seen. I must have been called ten or twelve times to be sure I'd vote. My doorbell was rung so many times that I almost stopped answering it. I received many mailing pieces, week after week. I've just never seen anything like this organization, and the amount of money spent in California. So for Estes to go into eleven primaries, and win acceptance and support of the people makes it seems to me that if ever a man had the people saying "I want Estes Kefauver for president"--Estes Kefauver did before he went to the convention. And much good it did him.

Chall: That's a whole other story, isn't it?

So, now he has won the primary, and his delegation is really the California Democratic party, for the time being, is it not?

Shirpser: Yes, that's right.

Power Politics and the Election of Clara Shirpser as
National Committeewoman

Chall: Okay, so then what does it do?

Shirpser: The next thing was the choice of National Committee members to represent them at the Democratic National Convention. This was scheduled after the June primary election. So, we met statewide at Fresno. I think the primary was about June fourth or fifth, and this Fresno convention--seems to be about June thirteenth or fourteenth.

Chall: It's usually very soon afterwards, isn't it--within the next week?

Shirpser: Yes. So, there wasn't much time to do any work. But--I can find the exact date later--but, when we started evaluating what my chances were, they looked rather dim.

My husband, who was very sensitive, had always participated fully with me in everything, decided he couldn't take it; he wasn't going to go to the conference, because he said he would be so disturbed, he'd disturb me, and probably would often ask me to withdraw, and I had promised I wouldn't withdraw. He had a

Shirpser: better idea of what I was coming up against than I did.

So, I drove up with a group of friends who were all supporting me. When we got to Fresno, to the California Hotel, and we were registering to get our rooms, a gentleman standing next to me, who was also registering, looked over my shoulder and saw my name, and he said, "Oh, you're Clara Shirpser. You're the gal who's running for national committeewoman. I hear good things about you, but do you mind if I ask you a very personal question?" I said, "No, I don't mind; I'll try to answer anything you want to ask me." He said, "Well, someone you think is a friend of yours, from your district, is spreading the word up and down this convention that you are so sick you're not going to live for four years, and we'd be wasting our vote, if we vote for you."

Chall: How incredible!

Shirpser: I said, "Are you serious?" He said, "Yes." And he told me who it was. I'm not going to mention the name, because I don't remember the name of this man who informed me of this malicious lie, but in view of what happened later, most people will draw their own conclusions. The illness to which he was referring was prior to my campaign by about two years; it must have been about 1948. My husband and I were out for dinner, and we ate what was laughingly called "chopped sirloin," you know--glorified hamburger--and we had it medium rare. A week later, we were both in the hospital with trichinosis, from which we almost died! We were there for five weeks in separate rooms, and I had the worse case.

Chall: Trichinosis from beef?

Shirpser: That was the problem, it wasn't beef. Obviously, there had to be pork in it to give us trichinosis. My husband was away from his office for three months, and we both were very dangerously ill; they tried out cortisone, for the first time, on me, and it got me over the crisis. I was very seriously ill, but anyone who could stand the rigors of my assembly campaign two years later, obviously wasn't sick.

So, I said to this man: "Do you think I ought to phone my doctor and get a health certificate?" I explained about having been seriously ill from trichinosis two years before. He said, "No, but I think that's the dirtiest kind of trick; to spread this rumor about your health." He said, "I'm from Southern California, and we're going to get a group together and tell them what kind of rotten tactics are being used against

Shirpser: a woman like you."

Fortunately I didn't have to do anything. But that was my first indoctrination into how rough politics can be. This was the first time, really, that I had been in a power struggle because for the assembly race, I was urged to run and did not have a Democratic opponent. There was some friction of course--but most of the people who were supporting me encouraged me and believed in me. I'd heard what politics could be like, but I hadn't any previous personal experience until that Fresno convention.

Naturally this unfair tactic antagonized me and made me more than ever determined to win, if this was the kind of thing I was going to be up against.

George Miller, who was the chairman of the delegation, had committed himself to Gertrude Clark. So, his position was clear; he had committed himself, and that was that. Privately, he told me he hoped I'd make it. George had a close friend who was his political ally and his business partner, who often wrote his speeches and supported him in all his endeavors. I've never seen a closer relationship between two men--thinking alike, working together. His name was Bert Coffey. He had given me some help in my assembly campaign and he thought I was doing a good job during my campaign. So, he said, "I don't have to be bound by what George is doing. I'm for you, and I'm going around saying so."

Chall: Oh really--now that's a split--

Shirpser: [Laughter] So that confused everyone completely. Who was George Miller really for? Well, George staunchly said he was for Gertrude, and he was, but when Bert said he was for me, that made the delegates wonder.

Chall: Why would Gertrude Clark have been considered?

Shirpser: From the point of view of party service, she deserved it. She had worked very hard in campaign after campaign. She had been Northern California women's chairman for Jimmy Roosevelt, when he ran for governor--maybe statewide women's chairman. She was very close to him and to many people on our delegation--like Mrs. Langdon Post, whose husband had been either Northern California chairman or state chairman for Jimmy's governor campaign. Mrs. Post masterminded Gertrude Clark's campaign,

Shirpser: and she was very knowledgeable; she knew her way around in politics.

Chall: So this was a--

Shirpser: A reward to be given to Gertrude Clark for long Democratic party service. In terms of what Gertrude had done for the Democratic party, and what I had done to date, there was no doubt she deserved it. But, as Bert Coffey had said during this battle: "I love Gertrude Clark like a mother. But, by God, we're not electing a mother; we're electing a Democratic National Committeewoman." He said, "Can you doubt that Clara would be the better national committeewoman?"

This was a help to me. Gertrude was very bitter about me. She evidently thought no one should have contested her for the post. She was quite unkind to me. I understood her point of view; it's very hard when you think you have something in the bag, and at the last minute, somebody comes on the delegation as an alternate, and all of a sudden, some of the top people on the slate are for her, when you thought you had it all under control.

There's a great deal of privilege that goes with being national committeewoman; you're the spokesman for the Democratic party in your state. You have an opportunity to meet the top people of the party, to participate in policy making, to be at the top of the list of Democratic party officials in your state. You're newsworthy--it's an important post if you make it so.

Many national committeewomen were figureheads. This was never true of the Kefauver national committeewomen. When we first came to the National Committee meetings, we were appalled at what figureheads many national committeewomen were! They were usually people with long party service, like Gertrude. I think that the largest number of them were people who had contributed large sums, through the years. Occasionally somebody gave them a resolution to read, memorializing someone who had died, or they made some minor resolution. They did sit at head tables, and sometimes were given the privilege of introducing an official, or a speaker (usually a minor one).

But, as a force on the National Committee, where they have equal numbers, those of us who were used to action and to participation were amazed and disappointed at how little women

Shirpser: counted in the National Committee. I think we've changed that a lot. The Kefauver women were capable women with good motivation; they wanted to accomplish something. They were elected to do a job, and they intended to do it.

Chall: So, this battle between you and Gertrude Clark indicated a policy struggle, in a sense, between those who wanted the national committeewoman as figurehead and those who wanted the woman who would really be an active policy maker or organizer. It was an indication of this?

Shirpser: Yes. Many people, you see, do want a woman who won't make trouble, who won't come up with ideas, who won't carry out policy, who will stay home until she's called to come to a meeting and sit at the head table. A great many men see women in that role and want them to be in that role. So, it was not a minority point of view, really. [Laughter]

Now, let me go back a bit. Harley Hise had phoned many people in my behalf. One of the difficulties about this conference at Fresno was that Harley wasn't well, and he couldn't come at the last minute. So, my best supporter, the man who counted most in our delegation couldn't be there. He sent his alternate, Suran Saroyan, who came to be one of my closest and dearest friends. He spoke for Harley and everyone knew he did. So when he spoke for me--he read what Harley had wanted him to write, and it was most laudatory about me.

Harley phoned Lyle Cook before the convention in Fresno. As I've said, we campaigned together both in the primary and in the general election--when he ran for Congress and I for assembly. We didn't have any friction between us; we were cooperative with each other, we spoke for each other; we introduced each other; we pooled our financial resources at one point when I happened to have a little more than he did, and I took the major cost of a joint mailing piece--that kind of thing. We ended good friends, and we continued to be good friends. He was one of the people who had urged me to join the Kefauver delegation, from the beginning.

So, Harley called him as one of his first contacts. Harley later told me the conversation. Lyle said, "I'm not going to get into a cat fight among a bunch of women." And Harley said to him, "Surely what you know of Clara, and the way you've worked together and campaigned together, and you know of her capability--surely you want her rather than Gertrude Clark." He said, "No, I'm not going to get into this fight at all." So Harley said,

Shirpser: "Something you're saying--the way you're saying it--bothers me. I want a promise from you that if you decide to stay neutral, which is certainly your prerogative, you won't do anything to hurt Clara. I'm quite disturbed at the way you're speaking to me." So Lyle said, "Of course I won't do anything to hurt Clara."

When we got to Fresno, Lyle studiously avoided me; didn't come near me once. Many of my friends were fanning out among the delegates. George told me John Anson Ford was the best man to be national committeeman from Southern California. (You see, the woman was coming from the North; either Gertrude or I, and the man then comes from the South.) He told me a lot about John, and John wrote to me, and said he'd heard excellent things about me, and he hoped I would make it, and he wanted to work with me, and he hoped I would support him.

I didn't know anybody else who was running, and I said, "Of course, I'll be delighted to support you for national committeeman. John Anson Ford's support would be a tremendous help because I didn't know any of the Southern California delegates.

After I'd been in Fresno a few hours, Tom Carrell came up to me and introduced himself, and we discovered we had many mutual friends. He said, "Clara, I want to run for national committeeman from Southern California, and I have a lot of support, and I want to support you, and I hope you will support me." I said, "Tom, I'd love to, but I can't. I'm already committed to John Anson Ford." He said, "Oh that's a pity. I don't think John's going to make it, but I certainly won't hold it against you, if you already promised to support him. But I'm really disappointed; I was looking forward to us both working together." Tom was very affable, likeable, friendly person with a long record of Democratic service. I really wished at that point that I wasn't committed, because he wanted to go out and actively work for me among the delegates--and to have me meet his friends.

There were meetings, and I was asked to speak to different groups, and I spent all my time doing that--going from one group to another, talking, and so did my friends. Finally George Miller said, "Let's have a Northern California caucus, and see if we can't get this fight settled in our Northern California caucus so we don't have a real donnybrook on the floor. It'll tear the delegation apart; it will hurt Kefauver. Will you agree?" I said, "Surely. Of course I'll agree." So he went to

Shirpser: Gertrude Clark, who was right there, and she said, "Yes, I'm willing; I'll do it."

So we went to the Northern California caucus. Immediately someone nominated a woman who wasn't even in the race (this was Meg Post's strategy, I learned later), and then someone seconded the nomination very glowingly. And then this woman who had been nominated said: "I thank you for the honor. But I wouldn't dream of contesting against that noble woman, Gertrude Clark, who has done such magnificent service for the Democratic party, and who deserves this. I withdraw in her favor, and anyone who was supporting me, I urge you to vote for Gertrude Clark."

Another woman then threw her hat into the race, someone I knew quite well, and they nominated her with much praise. I thought, "Well, maybe if we deadlock, she would be a good person to go to." She was nominated, she was seconded, and then she withdrew in favor of "that great woman," Gertrude Clark, urging her supporters to go to Gertrude.

Well, by that time, some of my friends had gotten on to this ploy, and they wanted to get themselves nominated and withdraw in my favor. I said, "No, this is the kind of political trick I don't do, and I don't want to do. So thank you, but don't get yourself nominated and withdraw in my favor. This is becoming a farce. The race is between Gertrude Clark and me; let's keep it that way." (And I said this loud enough for people to overhear.)

Gertrude Clark spoke to the group in a vague generalized way, saying laudatory things about herself, and practically nothing on issues, or about Estes, or anything of substance. I noted all these weaknesses in her speech, and I spoke out strongly on the things I felt people wanted to hear and needed to hear. Then I saw a little caucus going on between Gertrude and Meg and some of the other people for her. George announced we were both willing to abide by the vote of the Northern California caucus, since that's where the national committee-woman was coming from. We were both "good sports" and the vote would be final, and there wouldn't be a fight on the floor. Undoubtedly the Southern California delegates would caucus and chose the national committeeman, and then we could have an amiable meeting that night, and really discuss the things that are important to Kefauver.

Shirpser: Gertrude Clark stood up and said, "I did not agree that this vote would be binding." George said, "By God, you did!" And she said, "I did not." So I got up very quietly and said, "Mr. Chairman, I did give you my word at the same time Mrs. Clark gave you her word, and I always keep my word, and I am willing to abide by the decision of the Northern California caucus." She said, "I'm not! I didn't say I would."

So, George said, "Well, since we have nominated these two women, and we have seconded them and we have spoken, let us take a token vote, with the understanding that it will not count, and there will be a contest tonight in the overall meeting." They started voting, and we deadlocked. The vote was taken several times, and it was always a tie.

Chall: Was it a secret ballot?

Shirpser: Yes. So George said, "Listen, we've got to settle this. Or do you want to drop it?" And they said, "No, just one more vote." So, one of my friends was counting, and I think Lyle Cook was counting for Gertrude, which should have tipped me off as to what would happen later.

When the vote was counted finally, Gertrude won by one vote. So, they outsmarted themselves. They could have beaten me in that Northern California caucus. I guess when the vote didn't count, somebody must have switched, just to make her feel good or something.

Chall: Oh!

Shirpser: Because it had been deadlocked several times previously. So she won, and everybody went up to congratulate her. And George said, "It doesn't count, as you know. Mrs. Clark said she would not abide by the vote. And I had announced it would be a token vote, and this is a secret session, and no one is to go around the convention saying what happened here." Of course they all did [laughter], but he said, "This will go now to the floor at tonight's session."

A friend came up to me and said, "Clara, we learned something here." I think it was Glenn Harmon who was counting for me. He said, "When those ballots came in, everybody put Clark down-- C-l-a-r-k, and everybody voted for you as 'Clara,' C-l-a-r-a. C-l-a-r are the first four letters of each of your names when voted that way. So, there were two or three times when Lyle and

Shirpsen: I had a hard time to decide whether it was a 'k' or an 'a'." So he said, "Be sure, tonight, when they vote by secret ballot, they vote by last name. I think you easily could have had two more votes that we were fighting about, but since it didn't count anyway, I gave in."

I think it's an interesting comment on the way those delegates thought about us: she was "Mrs. Clark" and I was "Clara," which meant that I really had a better identification with the people who were for me, who saw me as Clara, on a first name basis, than she, as Mrs. Clark.

After this caucus, where I lost by one vote, several of my friends came up to me and said, "Clara, I think you ought to withdraw. You lost in the Northern California caucus, even though the vote doesn't count, and you know so few delegates from Southern California. You don't want to be a defeated candidate." So, I said, "If I withdraw I'm a defeated candidate. If I stay in, I might win. I promised Harley Hise that I wouldn't withdraw. He went to too much work, and the rest of you have done too much work. I don't like their tactics--the rumor spread about my health, a couple of women getting nominated and withdrawing in Gertrude's favor, Gertrude breaking her word about accepting the Northern California caucus vote. I don't like their tactics, and I am not going to withdraw. I'm going to stay in there fighting until the end. I don't care what the consequences are to me." So, they went on working for me.

As I came out of the Northern California caucus, Tom Carrell came up to me again, and he said, "How did you do in there, Clara?" I said, "I lost by one vote." He said, "Clara, come and meet the Southern California delegates. I don't like the way they're treating you, and I want to help you." He was really wonderful! I went from group to group, with Tom, and he said fine things about me, with John Anson Ford corroborating. I found that I knew some of the people from Southern California. This might really have been the decisive force--Tom having me come and "meet the boys." This was the way he expressed it, but, of course, there were women delegates, too. As I look back, I think that my opponent's tactics outraged Tom's sense of fair play, and even though I wasn't supporting him as national committeeman, he wanted to help me. This I never forgot, and always will appreciate.

Well, then we came to the evening meeting.

Chall: How exhausting--all this.

Shirpsers: Oh, I don't think in forty-eight hours I got more than three or four hours sleep. That night, Gertrude and I were nominated from the floor; I think I was nominated first. I know Glenn Harmon either nominated me or seconded me, and he was a very distinguished and able person, and then one woman seconded, too. I think it was Annis Rock--

Chall: Oh yes, from San Leandro.

Shirpsers: She always was a very good friend, and a great supporter of mine. Then, the nominations started for Gertrude Clark, and Lyle Cook got up--from my district. This is one of the most basic laws of politics: if you don't have your district behind you, you can't win. Now, this was true when Estes was running for vice-president against Jack Kennedy, in 1956. Tennessee was supporting Albert Gore. This almost lost Estes that vice-presidential nomination until Tennessee switched to Kefauver. You have got to have your home base for you. No one could have harmed me as much as Lyle Cook! We were social friends, we had many mutual friends, he was from my district, and he got up and nominated Gertrude Clark! It was as if someone had stuck a knife in my back. I just couldn't believe it. I hadn't done anything but cooperate and be a friend of his, and to think he could do this to me. I just can't tell you how badly his disloyalty hurt me.

Lyle continued his nomination of Gertrude and said: "One of the reasons I'm doing this is, is because the women of California do not want Clara Shirpsers as Democratic National Committeewoman."

Chall: The women of California--!

Shirpsers: This boomeranged badly. He couldn't have done anything that would have been more helpful to me. All over the place--Minnie Lou Eakin, Annis Rock--in every part of the room, women jumped to their feet--"I want Clara Shirpsers. I'm for Clara Shirpsers. This is contemptible. Shame on you." They said all these things to him. Women kept leaping to their feet, everyone talking at once, and shouting that they were for me.

So, the nominations were made and seconded, and we were asked to speak. I'd gone over my material very carefully with several more-experienced people, so I would be sure that I made the salient points. Poor Gertrude--she was so upset, and I think that she may have had too much to drink.

Shirpser: She got up there and spoke and told an off-color joke first--which a woman in her seventies doesn't usually find to be good taste. I know that she was not in her usual form. I was really sorry for her, and even felt a little guilty. She was vague, she was wandering, she was emotional--she kept praising herself and her record. She didn't say the things that should have been said.

Then I got up and spoke quietly. I tried to say the things I felt they should hear, and about what I hoped to do for the Democratic party to enlarge and improve our effectiveness, of my belief in Estes, my devotion to him--that I would do everything possible to help him, and to build the Democratic party. Many of us were new people in the party; we didn't start out with a lot of cynical and preconceived ideas, and I thought we could be a tremendous force for good in California, and this is what I told them that I wanted to do.

Then the voting began, and the result was forty for me, twenty-nine for Clark. I was walking up and down in back of the room by then; I couldn't sit still another minute. And the stampede of people rushing to congratulate me pinned me against the wall--I couldn't move; everybody was hugging and kissing me! Somebody told me I gasped at one point, "I've kissed at least a hundred people. Only forty voted for me. It's not fair." So, one of the men said, "Well, if you'd kissed them first, Clara, the score would have been a lot higher in your favor."

This victory gave me a wonderful feeling. Then of course many friends met in my room, and we had drinks together and celebrated. We called Ad right away. He told me that he had been pacing the floor all evening. You know, it was after midnight by then. I said, "Thank heaven you didn't come up here, Ad, you couldn't have taken it." Ad was a gentle person and he hated bitter controversy. If he'd heard what they were saying about me and the way they were hurting me, he just couldn't have borne it. I said, "I'm glad you didn't come, but I made it. I won!" He said, "I always knew you would." Then we called Harley. He had told us: "No matter what time of night it is, call me from Fresno." It was about 12:30 a.m. I told him the whole story of what Lyle had done, and he said, "I knew I could depend on you and that you would keep your word and not withdraw. Lyle did not keep his word to me that he would not do anything to hurt you. I'll look forward to telling him what I think of him."

Chall: What do you think was his reason?

Shirpser: I think he thought Gertrude was going to win.

Chall: But if he thought she was going to win, why would he have made the kind of statements that he did?

Shirpser: I never really knew. Perhaps he thought he was helping her to win, and would thus improve his chance to be appointed to some post he might want. He came over and talked to me the next day. I said, "Lyle, it's still too recent, and I am too hurt. I really can't discuss it with you. You have hurt me more than almost any other human being in my whole life. I didn't think you were capable of being so disloyal and saying such derogatory and untrue things about me. I don't want to talk to you about it." He said, "What did Harley say?" I said, "I think Harley will enjoy telling you himself what he thinks of you."

The next morning we had a general meeting. After all, we spent the whole previous night just fighting about the national committee posts--

Chall: Excuse me, can I ask you what happened in the battle over the committeeman? Was it the same kind of thing?

Shirpser: No, it wasn't at all, because Tom Carrell withdrew in favor of John Anson Ford. He realized by then that John was going to win and he chose to avoid a bitter fight. Tom was wonderfully supportive of me later, too, and John said nice things about me, also, and that he was looking forward to working with me. We had a wonderful relationship, John and I. He was wise and experienced. He sometimes said I was too idealistic, and naive, and once he said that I talked too much! But, I really learned so much from him, and I appreciated his criticism, which was constructive. He and his wife, and Ad and I always had dinner together when he was here and when we were in Southern California. We had a perfectly fine relationship, and I have great respect and admiration for him. We sent each other copies of letters which went to the chairman of National Committee in Washington, D.C. and several letters in policy changes which we both signed.

But, the national committeeman fight was not a bitter one, because Tom withdrew.

Chall: Then, what else was there for this meeting the next day?

Shirpser: The next day, we discussed what we were going to do at the convention, and what our strategy and planning would be, and delegates were elected to serve on committees. You know, the winning delegation from each state has a man and a woman on the Platform Committee, the Credentials Committee, the Rules Committee, etc.

IV THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION, 1952
(Interview 4, June 29, 1972)

Aboard the Delegates' Train to Chicago

Chall: I'd like to know, first of all, how the California delegation planned for that convention, how you got to Chicago and what your duties were supposed to be.

Shirpser: We went by train. You know in those days, planes were not readily available for a large group, and it was much less expensive to go by train. We started out with such high hopes. As I look back, it seems incredible that we were as naive as we were--most of us had never been to a convention before. We went with the assumption that Kefauver, having won eleven out of fifteen primaries--which no one had ever done before--that the people had spoken and they wanted Kefauver to be nominated. He didn't win by pluralities--he won by big majorities. I think he beat the Brown slate in California by something like three to one. One of the greatest victories he had was in California, and he was well aware of it, and he was depending on us. We were just full of the crusading spirit--we were going to do-or-die for Estes. I must say, we did stay loyal to him throughout that bitter, frustrating, boss-ridden convention. We never wavered--everybody was trying to make deals with us; many delegates from other states were switching, and we didn't--through the final vote, we stayed for Estes. It may have been naive, but we certainly carried out our commitment. No one in the Kefauver California delegation departed from it.

We got on the train, and there was much camaraderie and good fellowship, and everyone was looking forward to the convention and to nominate Estes. We had many wires delivered to the train from people throughout California telling us that this was what they wanted. As soon as we got on the train, I had a nice experience.

Shirpser: Suren Saroyan, whom I always call Sue, came in Harley Hise's place, because Harley was still ill, and he brought with him his cousin, William Saroyan, the author and playwright. They had a compartment in the same car that Ad and I did, and Sue is one of the most hospitable people in the world. The first thing he did was hand me the biggest box of candy I've ever seen--I think it was ten pounds. And he said, "I want you to go up and down the train and offer this candy to everyone, and they'll sweeten up for you." It was really a darling gesture for Sue to make and I enjoyed doing this, and it did get me around--meeting people and talking to them; everyone was pleased.

Chall: The whole delegation--the delegates, the alternates, and the second alternates were all on that train?

Shirpser: Most of them.

Chall: And their wives and husbands?

Shirpser: Oh yes, and some even brought friends. There seemed to be enough space on the train where everyone could go who wanted to. What problems it made for me--to get passes to the convention for all these extra people! You know, you go all the way there at your own expense, and obviously you want to get on the convention floor, and there simply is no such thing as a second alternate. I had already written to Les Biffel the convention manager. I went to him time after time in Chicago, seeking more passes. He was most understanding of my problems and did his best to help me; he was really awfully good about it. But naturally, I couldn't get nearly enough passes, and that was a tremendous bone of contention at every caucus we had.

Another thing that Sue did; at every stop, he would load up with more food, and he'd started out with a great deal. So, any time you went by his compartment, they'd say, "Come on in," and there were many people in there eating salami, and cheese, and cantaloupes, and grapes--whatever the produce was as we went through places, they brought it on. Of course, William Saroyan is one of the most delightful people alive. He's completely uninhibited, says anything he thinks of, does anything--you never knew what was going to happen next. He was on the train to get material for a political book or play, which I've never heard of since; I guess we were too much for him. But anyway, he was a delight to have close by and to be with, with his personality and his enthusiasm and his jokes--he really was lots of fun.

Shirpser: But our purpose was very serious. We kept meeting in caucuses and in groups, and of course, there was practically no sleep on the train--people were going up and down the aisles--you know, calling out: "Kefauver, the winning Democrat," --all kinds of slogans. But some of us did meet and made provisional plans "in case"--which we just whispered--"in case he doesn't get it on the first ballot."

One of the plans, which I initiated, was supported by some of our more experienced delegates and they wanted me to make this resolution if it were possible. We had all watched the Republican convention--which preceded ours--and the amount of parading in the aisles, the yelling and hollering, the paid people, dressed up in wild costumes, gave it such a circus atmosphere; it was quite disgusting. We thought, many of us, that people would just leave their television sets and stop watching for long periods until the parades and cavorting were over, and that there was a more valuable use of television than we'd all been exposed to in the Republican convention. Remember, television was very new then and untried.

Chall: This was the first televised convention, I guess.

Shirpser: Yes, this was 1952.

So, we came up with all sorts of plans, which I'll go into later. But then, the groundwork for them was laid very carefully--with John Anson Ford, with Dave Friedenrich, who was one of the officers of our delegation (he and his wife, Edith), Sam Gardner, who felt very strongly about this (he has since been a judge in Marin County). We were meeting as intelligent people, not experienced, most of us, but full of serious, earnest purpose. Sometimes when you're not experienced, you don't know you can't do things, and this had some value, because if you really want to do it, sometimes you find a way to do it.

Finally we got to Chicago and we walked out of the station into one of the hottest days of the year--around noon, and somebody in our delegation came up with the brilliant idea that we should march through the streets waving Kefauver banners (evidently they had banners and placards waiting for us at the Chicago station). "Californians for Kefauver"--you know, with the marching delegates shouting slogans. Well, in that heat, it seemed absolutely insane to me, but since the rest of them wanted to do it, I started--Ad and I--but about two blocks later,

Shirpser: a taxi came, and Ad grabbed me and said, "For heavens sake, get in. You're going to collapse in this heat." We went ahead in the taxi, and it was a good idea that we did, although some people resented that I didn't walk all the way with the rest of the delegates. I said I was getting dizzy and faint, and this was really so.

Chall: Did the others all walk?

Shirpser: Most of them, but some fell by the wayside. One after another, they'd straggle in, after a taxi ride--half-dead. You know, we're not used to that kind of heat. It seemed to me a crazy thing to do, but the majority of them did stay with it. We had some very rugged people on that delegation!

Well, in the meantime, I got to the hotel and registered and told the room clerk that the delegates were on their way and to have their rooms ready. So I did accomplish something by getting to the hotel earlier. To my delight I found that I had one of the very few air-conditioned rooms in the whole Palmer House, and I don't think I'd have survived that convention without it. I found then that there truly were some privileges to being Democratic National Committeewoman! But it had it's bad side, too. John Anson Ford, and I, and George Miller, too, had air-conditioned rooms--and this meant the others who were dying of the heat were always in our rooms. So early morning, late at night--you never knew when you could go to bed, and, of course, I couldn't begrudge them the chance to cool off a little bit in my room; but it meant very little sleep for Ad and me.

At any rate, we often met this way and talked of plans and compared experiences--so it had some value, too.

I don't know how to describe the convention. It really was cruel and unusual punishment. I don't know why anyone wants to go to a convention, and yet I went to three of them.

Accommodations at the Convention

Chall: Yes, it's exciting. [Laughs]

Shirpser: They are exciting. But, just consider the problems. There are mobs of people trying to get food, which means you have such a

Shirpser: long wait in the dining room of your hotel. You order food from room service--it doesn't come. So you may start for the convention without breakfast or lunch, depending on what time the convention starts. Sometimes before you got there you have something to eat, if you have had patience enough to stand in line. I remember once, Ad went down to the dining room and got a tray of food and carried it up to our room, because I couldn't face the day without some coffee and some food in my stomach.

Then the problem of transportation. Now, this was made wonderfully easy for me, and I'll never cease to be grateful to Ellie Heller. She had been the Democratic National Committee-woman before me, and we'd had a very friendly relationship always. Since she was on the losing slate, and I was going to be the new national committeewoman, she had no desire to go to Chicago. She could have come with us on the delegation, but she would have been unhappy. She was used to a great deal of power and influence, and people doing what she asked them to do. In our delegation I doubt that she would have had that consideration. I would have given it to her, of course, but very few others would have. Her state chairman had been William Malone, and they had had a very powerful hold on the whole party machinery.

By giving me the national committee post's prerogatives ahead of time, at the beginning of the convention, this meant I had a car and a driver, which was simply marvelous. You would phone the car pool and the car would be ready at a given time or as close to it as they could, and the drivers were all college boys, very well-informed and accommodating. They talked among themselves, so that every morning and every night, when we were in the car, I'd get the latest "dope" on what they had found out from their different people, and since we had so little contact with anyone except the Kefauver delegations from other states, this was invaluable. I had an especially good driver--I kept in touch with him for years afterwards. He was intelligent and interested, and he was for Estes. He said, at the end of the convention, they had a contest, and he'd kept track of how many people I had in the car, because everybody was sitting on everybody's lap on every trip back and forth from the convention. When I'd see all our delegates standing waiting for a bus, I'd say, "Come on, get in the car." So, we had as many as ten people at a time, though we broke all the rules. But our driver enjoyed it, and he never reported us. At the end of the convention, the college drivers decided that

Shirpser: I'd had far more people in my car than any other national committee member.

Most delegates arrived at the convention quite exhausted. They walked into this International Amphitheater, which was air conditioned, and where we from California were sitting, the draught was almost unbearable. We'd come in dripping wet from the intense heat. We learned to bring coats or sweaters to put on when we got into the Amphitheater. Within twenty-four hours, practically everybody had a cold, some had the flu, a couple were in the hospital. At the end, I had such a bad case of laryngitis I couldn't speak for days. It was really difficult--the rigors were almost unbelievable.

Chall: There was no food?

Shirpser: Yes, there was a cafeteria, but with all these hundreds and hundreds of people trying to eat, I existed on what anybody went out and got me, because I was afraid to leave the floor. So much was going on that I had to try to keep abreast of various crises. Somebody brought me an ice cream cone; the next person would bring me a greasy and cold hot dog; and from the next person perhaps I'd get a cheese sandwich. What anybody brought me I ate! I drank coffee constantly. Everyone had indigestion; we all had boxes of Tums and Bisodol with us or whatever we could get. You just don't know how you survive four or five days of that!

Pressures continue all the time, and crowds, and noise, and any time you wanted to get in the aisles, it was worth your life! People were pushing in both directions. Usually I got some man to run interference for me, and later, when the parade started, really I just had to put my arms around the waist of whoever was near me to just keep on my feet. You just have no idea what a convention is like! You had to be there in those days to believe it.

The Value of the Right Contacts

Chall: Were all three of them that you attended pretty much the same, or did they change in time?

Shirpser: Well, they changed for the better I think. Before the 1956 convention we'd introduced a lot of resolutions to reform procedures. Then, too, I knew many delegates. In the 1952 convention I had an official box, too, courtesy of Ellie [Heller]. Jimmy Roosevelt was still national committeeman, because his term ended when the convention ended. He was the only other person that I remember who switched from the Truman slate to the Kefauver slate. It was fine for me to work with him, because he knew his way around. Most of the rest of us, really, were inept. We just didn't know the people we should have been talking to. We were seldom included in the important functions to which we should have gone, because the opportunity to meet other people, to talk with them, to know what they're thinking is terribly important.

That's why the box was so helpful to me, because on each side of me there were other national committee members, and I could hear their discussions, and often participate in them. In our box besides Jimmy, was Nanna Thomas from Alabama, who was national committeewoman and very experienced in politics, and Mrs. Leonard Thomas. They were for Kefauver. She and her husband had been to at least three or four previous Democratic convention. So, she did know her way around, and she helped me a lot--introducing me to people.

I entered my box wearing my big "Kefauver the Winning Democrat" button--I have one much larger than that one in the picture--and there were a lot of southern gentlemen in the next box. They're very gallant; they'd say flattering things to me, and then they'd say, "Honey, take off that button. You ain't goin' no place. Kefauver is not going to win this convention." This same attitude was evident wherever I went. "Kefauver can't win. Wait till you see what's going to happen; Kefauver isn't going to win."

I'd say to them, "But you're from the South. Aren't you proud of him? Look at the way he's gone to the people all over this country; look at the acclaim he's had." "No, we don't like Kefauver" was their answer. One of the reasons they didn't like him, as I learned when I got to know them better, was that

Shirpser: he couldn't be controlled; he wouldn't do what he was told to do and he had a national point of view, rather than the Southern ideologies. Estes was a great United States Senator-- why should he do what the county chairmen, and the governor, and the national committee members told him to do? He was doing what he believed to be right, and that's why he was great. But to them that was a break with the South. Later, when the so-called "loyalty oath" came up and Estes supported it--that was the final blow.

They kept telling me, and this, too, I kept hearing wherever I went: 'President Truman says, 'Not Kefauver,' and Mr. Sam is chairman of the convention. You just wait and see if he ever calls on California. You can press the button, you can wave your banners--he won't see you; you can't talk, because you don't get on the microphones, on the loudspeaker, unless Mr. Sam presses that button.'

Chall: I see. These were primarily the Southern delegates who were telling you this?

Shirpser: Yes, on all sides of me. And I refused to believe it. I couldn't believe it; I didn't want to believe it, and yet everything they told me turned out to be true.

My contacts there, though, were valuable, because sometimes I'd go out and stand in the corridor behind the boxes, and have a coke or coffee, and when other delegates saw that I had the National Committee badge, and they didn't know me--the boxes were in the hands of the National Committee members--it gave me a chance to meet and talk to people I never would have otherwise met or talked to in that convention.

That's why in '56 it was so different, because then I'd been on the committee for four years, and I was invited to strategy meetings, and I did know the background, and policy matters, and how to conduct myself, whereas, in 1952, it was all hit-and-miss. I was not invited to many functions of the National Committee. Occasionally I was, but they were not the really important ones, where I would have had a chance to meet people and perhaps to influence their thinking just a little.

Chall: But wasn't Jimmy Roosevelt invited, as national committeeman, and wasn't he able to report to you similar kinds of attitudes [about Kefauver] from groups other than the South?

Shirpsr: Yes--because he had many important contacts, and he kept coming back to our caucuses and reporting, as did I when I had learned anything of value. Of course, Jimmy was far more experienced and knowledgeable in his view of things and what he learned. But he, too, because he was for Kefauver, was somewhat of an outcast. That convention was dominated by Mr. Truman, Sam Rayburn, and Jake Arvey, political official of Cook County, Illinois, as well as Democratic National Committeeman for Illinois. He was co-manager with Les Biffel, and he was the one who set many convention policies. He was the one who controlled much that happened at that convention. He is a ward-boss type of person. How we got a man like Adlai Stevenson through Arvey's tactics, I shall never know. It's simply a miracle.

Arvey was really devoted to Stevenson, I think, and impressed by his tremendous qualities. Adlai Stevenson had been governor of Illinois. Adlai made the welcoming address at the convention. This was a truly wonderful speech, and got him tremendous approbation, even from the Kefauver people. I never was closed-minded about Adlai; I was simply for Estes. Of course, Stevenson was not a declared candidate. He was very reluctant to run. I think he truly was drafted.

Well, California had quite a few caucuses--

The Pressures

Chall: How many delegates were there from California?

Shirpsr: We had seventy-eight delegates and seventy-eight alternates.

Chall: Oh, then it was smaller than it is today.

Shirpsr: Yes, you see we have half-votes today, and we've increased the number at every convention since then.

Chall: It doesn't do the conventions much good, does it--increasing the number of delegates?

Shirpsr: Well, it gets much more participation through more delegates, but it's more unwieldy. I'm for having more delegates, since the delegates think of it as a reward, and where they'll have

Shirpser: a chance to accomplish something. Everyone wants to go, and you do have a tremendous sense of identification with something that's very important, where you might accomplish a great deal, but mostly it's frustration.

Chall: Were the caucuses with the delegates and the alternates then?

Shirpser: Oh yes.

Chall: So that was a hundred and some odd people--

Shirpser: No, more than a hundred fifty--and then we had the second alternates.

Chall: Did they come to the caucuses too?

Shirpser: Oh, yes, they met with us too.

Chall: How were you able to caucus with so many people?

Shirpser: We rented a big room, and we'd meet daily before the convention, and we'd meet after the convention sometimes, too. We had to pay quite a bit for the room, so we had to concentrate our efforts as much as possible. It was a very unruly delegation.

Chall: Who chaired these caucuses?

Shirpser: George Miller--he was our chairman of the delegation.

Chall: What did you do in caucus?

Shirpser: We talked about plans. I would report each time; Jimmy Roosevelt would report; George Miller would report. We were fanning out through the convention as much as we could--going up to delegations and saying who we were and trying to talk with them. Well, it's very different if you go there and say, "I'm Clara Shirpser. I'm the new national committeewoman from California," than during later conventions, when you know many Democratic officials all over the country.

Later, in '56, I had people like Governor "Soapy" Williams of Michigan, with whom I could confer, who was helping me with Estes' vice-presidential fight, and people like Governor Dave Lawrence and Matt McClosky (National Committee treasurer) in Pennsylvania. Now, it makes all the difference when you can go up to someone you know and have worked with and who has some

Shirpser: friendship for you and belief in whatever you're capable of doing, than if you just go up there as a stranger. You'd try to ask questions; you get very guarded answers.

So, we couldn't accomplish very much, but we certainly tried. At our first caucus, there was a gentleman on our delegation named Elmer Delaney, who in past times had been quite a powerful person, or at least he continued to think that he was. And the first crack out of the box, he got on his feet and said everyone was having such a terrible time getting tickets, and it was obvious that I was inexperienced, that I didn't have the prestige necessary to get a sufficient number of tickets. So he wanted to take the tickets and badges away from me. He claimed it would make my life "much more pleasant," and he would know better how to operate. I was so outraged, I could hardly talk, but I got to my feet and said, "Mr. Delaney is evidently not aware of the rules of the Democratic National Committee," and at this point, Jimmy Roosevelt got to his feet and said, "I fortunately have the rules right here, in a pamphlet, and I wish to read to Mr. Delaney what the rules are: It plainly states that the national committeewoman and the national committeeman shall have charge of all the tickets, badges, and passes, for the convention. And I assure you, I don't intend to give up mine, and I'm positive Mrs. Shirpser will not either."

I said, "I wouldn't consider giving them up. This is my responsibility, and I will carry it out to the best of my ability. I have written to Mr. Biffle; I have been to see him twice since arriving at the convention. No other delegation in the whole United States has second alternates; and yet some of the second alternates are the experienced people in our party--like congressmen, legislators, chairmen of the state Democratic County Committees who were on the Brown delegation and lost--we've got to get them on the floor.

"Mr. Biffle has promised me, Mr. Delaney, something I doubt that he would have given to you. Every day, if I will delegate someone to go to his office in the Amphitheater, he will give us whatever passes, or tickets (for that day only) that he can find for us. He understands our problem; he's trying to help us. Jimmy and I are going to appoint a committee, from both the North and South, of both men and women from our delegation, and they will be in a central place where you can see them, and each day, they will have those passes and tickets that Mr. Biffle gives us."

Shirpser: Then I requested "that any of you who are not going to attend that day or evening session--if you're ill, or you can't get there--please give your delegate's badge to that committee. They will be responsible people; they will see that you get them back for the next session. In this way," I said, "I think we can function as well as we possibly can. As for the badges, I've requests from several congressmen--perhaps they have a young son they want to be a page--Jimmy and I are doing our best to allocate these positions as fairly as we can, so that we do it by geographical location. We do it for the people who are entitled to these badges, of which there are only a few."

Chall: Can you tell me the difference between a badge and a pass?

Shirpser: Yes. A pass just lets you on the floor. Now, for instance--Les Biffle asked me if my husband was along, and I said, "Yes, but I don't know if he's going to get on the convention floor." He said, "Here, he's an usher." So, he gave me an usher's badge, and Ad wore that badge. You cannot get on the convention floor unless you have your convention ticket, your pass, or your badge.

Chall: So a badge lets you on the convention floor--

Shirpser: You try to sit with your state's delegation if you can. Most tickets are for the spectators' balconies. If you can't, you sit wherever you can. There are duties that go with the badges: you are supposed to act as an usher when needed, or as a page, running back and forth from the delegation. Our California pages were important to me. I'll tell you about that later.

It was a terrible struggle, because we had at least fifty people there who weren't supposed to be there, and we never could get all of them into the convention. There were delegates' wives, too. We did get some tickets for the spectators' section.

The Day Estes Kefauver was Nominated

Chall: Yes, what about that?

Shirpser: Supposedly we were allocated them in the number commensurate to our delegation. Most of the time, I think it was quite fair, except when the nominations were made, and then it was one of the roughest, most unjustified procedures that I ever saw. Perhaps we ought to talk about it right now.

The day Estes was to be nominated, Ad and I went to our box, and we were denied admission to our box! I said, "But you can't kick me out of our box; I'm the Democratic National Committeewoman for California!" We were told, "We have orders from the convention management that no one will sit in the boxes today." I said, "Well you won't keep me out of my box!" So, we went and found Les Biffle, and he hadn't heard this before. Fortunately, we had come early enough. He said, "This is outrageous. I'll countermand that order immediately. That's Jack Arvey," between his clenched teeth.

So we got in our box. Everybody had a struggle for the first half-hour, until it went around the convention that we could actually go into our own boxes.

Chall: Were your boxes down on the floor?

Shirpser: Oh no, they're up on a mezzanine level. They're above, so you could look over the convention and see what was happening, and you could hear better, too.

I didn't tell you, but when California was seated, I was on the floor a lot of the time with the California delegation. I was sitting right alongside George Miller, and so was John Anson Ford. John didn't have a box seat, so I often asked him into my box whenever there was room. John was not yet national committeeman, Jimmy still was. What happened was that on the floor in the location where the California delegation was seated, there was no audible sound. Whether this was deliberate--and at that point we were ready to believe anything bad was deliberate--we could not hear the speakers! It was maddening! Someone was up there making a speech that was absolutely basic to our knowledge, and we couldn't hear a thing.

- Shirpsers: So, we kept delegating people to go out in the hall and watch television, and take notes, and come back and tell us what the speaker had said. This happened over and over again. Other delegations complained too, so I'm trying to be fair and assume that there were simply pockets throughout that enormous place where you couldn't hear anything. But it was frustrating to sit there and see speakers moving their lips and not know what they were saying. I could hear better in the box. So I often went there and took notes, too, and brought them back to the delegation.
- Chall: And those first several days, it was a matter of credentials and platform--organization?
- Shirpsers: Yes. But then when the nominations came, you see, it was terribly important to know what was going on.
- Chall: I see, so that was the day they didn't let you in your box.
- Shirpsers: Yes. I finally got into my box, and looked around the Amphitheater, and except for little groups here and there, all the spectator seats in the balcony were empty. I don't think there were 200 people in the, perhaps, 10,000 spectator seats. Maybe there were more than 10,000; I'm just taking a wild guess.
- Chall: And most of the time those seats had been occupied?
- Shirpsers: They were all always occupied. People were sitting in the aisles, they were standing at the rear; there were tens of thousands of people there day and night. This day, when Estes was going to be nominated, there were practically no people as spectators.

I've reread Professor Gorman's book on Kefauver, and he quotes Jack Norman, who was the state chairman of Tennessee.* Mr. Norman said that Tennessee got fifty-six seats when Estes was nominated--for spectators, and Illinois got over 700, so this shows you the way that convention was boss-ridden.

I had a lot of placards and banners, which Nanna Thomas and Jimmy and I intended to wave in our box when Estes was

*Joseph Bruce Gorman, Kefauver: A Political Biography (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

Shirpser: nominated. They were confiscated by the guards at the entrance to the boxes. They said no one could have any noisemakers, flags or banners in the boxes that day. We had a great big banner that was supposed to go in front of the box that we had made up--"Kefauver the Winning Democrat" was the slogan we usually used. That was taken away from us. There was a page there near our box, and I'd gotten quite friendly with him by then. I told him my plight, and I said, "Will you please take this note down to George Miller and tell him what's happening up here?" So he went down, and under his coat, he smuggled from our delegation similar placards and banners to the ones they'd taken away from me. He and our other California pages kept running back and forth, back and forth, and handing us the banners and placards they had hidden under their coats.

When the nomination of Estes was actually made, there was a tremendous parade in the aisles on the convention floor. But nothing happened in the galleries. It was almost silent in the spectators' section. And Nanna and Jimmy and I were practically the only ones on our feet (and Ad too, of course, and Leonard, her husband)--we were all waving banners and yelling, and we did the best we could. Estes later phoned me and said we were practically the only box that television had their cameras focused on because at least we were doing something in his support.

Nanna had been an actress in her early years, and that day she was wearing an enormous red velvet hat covered with flowers. So she leaped to her feet, and she was throwing kisses, and she dragged me up. I was so embarrassed, you know--this wasn't my style [laughs]--to stand there throwing kisses and waving, and all this, but she said, "You have to do it for Estes," so I did it. And Estes said, really, we were the only "alive" box cheering for him in that whole place.

Well, this is what was done to us constantly throughout that convention.

Then, just before Stevenson was nominated, you never saw such a flood of people fill the whole spectators' sections, fill all the boxes. They were loaded with noisemakers and flags and placards. In fact, sitting next to me in the box that had been the Southern National Committee members' box were John Fell Stevenson, and Borden Stevenson, and all of the Stevenson family. There was a most tremendous outpouring of

Shirpser: enthusiasm and waving and yelling--which Estes couldn't get because his people weren't allowed to sit in the spectators' section that day.

You have to have been there to believe what went on. It doesn't seem very important now when I tell it, but when it's on television, and it's your candidate, and you are stopped from doing the things that another candidate is helped to do, it is a very bitter experience. I believe in democracy, and this Democratic convention was the least democratic procedure or meeting in which I have ever participated. You came away from there with the feeling: "What's the use?" Then, you think: "Now what can a person do to make it better?"

Well, there were ways to make it better, and we did, later.

Chall: How did the other delegates feel that day about the nominating procedure?

Shirpser: All of the Kefauver people were beside themselves with resentment and anger. They really were sincere people; they believed in Estes wholeheartedly. Estes did something which made the management of the convention furious: His father, who was very elderly--way deep into his eighties--wanted to come to the convention, and of course, Estes had a seat with the Tennessee delegation. Because his father couldn't come alone, Estes came on the floor with his father. The minute his delegates saw him, they tore the place apart--everybody rushed into the aisles; they started waving banners and placards and paraded in front of the Tennessee delegation. Mr. Sam was absolutely livid with rage, pounding his gavel, and demanding that the aisles be cleared, and that delegates return to their seats. That took a long time, and did disrupt the proceedings. But, it's a human thing to do. Estes' father wanted to go to the convention; he wanted his son to take him. This was just part of Estes' whole personality: he wanted to take his father because his father wanted him to do so. He didn't do it with any malicious intent; he didn't do it to disrupt the convention. It must have been very heartwarming to him to see how the whole place erupted in his favor, and, of course, more than ever, this rebounded against him, because his opponents saw what he could do when he was on the floor, and they were more determined than ever to stop him.

Perhaps we ought to go on to the crux of this convention.

The Loyalty Oath

Chall: The loyalty oath?

Shirpser: Yes.

Chall: That seems to have been the turning point.

Shirpser: I'm not sure it would have come out any differently. Also, I'm not sure that Estes made the great blunder, which Gorman thinks he did. I think Estes, more than ever, became a person of high principle and integrity who did what he thought was right, no matter what the cost was to him. In his Senate race for reelection, in Tennessee, later, even though they were very angry with him for what he did to support the loyalty oath, his stand may have actually helped him get reelected as U.S. Senator. Often in Tennessee, they didn't like what Estes said, they didn't like the issues he stood for, but they admired him for his courage and integrity and they trusted him, and that got him tremendous support in his own state.

Blair Moody was chairman of the so-called Loyalty Oath Committee. It was a misnomer "loyalty oath" because all it meant was something that seems to me basic if you go to a convention. You fight for your candidate; you do the best you can to get him the nomination. If he loses, and the majority of the delegates at the convention say, "This is the man we want"--in this case it was Stevenson--then you support him. If you don't intend to support the candidate who is chosen by the majority, you have no place in a convention.

Don't you agree that if you go to any meeting, and there is a contest, and there is a vote, you have to abide by the majority decision or leave the group, whether it's the League of Women Voters, or the Junior Chamber of Commerce, or a banking committee. You either go along with the majority, under our system, or you leave and don't hold office in the Democratic party.

In the South they had a very peculiar system. They had a little drawing of an animal--a chicken or a rooster or whatever

Shirpser: it was--that was the symbol of the Democratic party in each Southern state. So the ballot would have that little identifying mark, which meant it was the official ballot of the Democratic party. The states that didn't like what the convention did would go home, and they'd put their own candidate for president-- whoever they decided on--on the ticket, instead of abiding by the decision of the Democratic Convention, which is legally the body to choose who's going to be the nominee of the party. It was unconstitutional, but it was traditional in the South.

Blair Moody introduced this resolution; he'd worked awfully hard as chairman of this committee--very capable, very hard-working--and there was a large majority of his committee for this resolution, which they worded very carefully.

Chall: What committee was this--was this the Credentials Committee?

Shirpser: As I remember, it was a special committee set up to discuss procedures in this convention.

Chall: Then it was a National Committee committee?

Shirpser: Blair Moody, I believe, was then a congressman; he had some official office in the party; he wasn't just chosen out of the blue. He came from Michigan and he was close to Governor Williams and to Walter Reuther, the United Auto Workers president. He was an excellent speaker, a very handsome man, and he handled the situation skillfully.

I don't have the exact wording of that resolution, but it was to the effect that any delegation which was participating in this 1952 Democratic National Convention would abide by the decision of this convention as to who the presidential nominee of the party would be, and that they would go back to their states, put that nominee on the official ballot and support him.

Chall: I see.

Shirpser: That seems to me a reasonable, and logical, and ethical thing to do. The California delegation could not see why anyone should object.

Well, Virginia was the state--the focal point of this whole thing, and Virginia refused to accept the loyalty oath. They said, in effect, "As Southern gentlemen, we are honorable

Shirpser: people; we are not going to be told who to vote for."

Chall: How come--did they go down the roster of the states alphabetically with respect to the loyalty oath that day, and when they got to "V"--

Shirpser: Yes, they got to Virginia--the seating of the delegation was contested.

Chall: They were almost finished then. Alabama went along, and Georgia? What did they do?

Shirpser: A lot of states could state, for instance, "Alabama passes" or "Georgia yields to the state of Virginia." The opponents of the loyalty oath wanted to get to Virginia as quickly as possible. Many states had not voted at the point that Virginia was called upon. I think Georgia and Mississippi were the other two states. That's why, when Estes was finally making his decision, it appeared from every communication he'd had, from everything that had been said to him that the majority of the states were for this loyalty oath, even in the South. His staff was not the capable staff that Stevenson had--or Harriman. Because Estes had run out of funds; he didn't have the money to hire the efficient professionals he needed. His people were mostly volunteers; they were doing the best they could, but the avenues of communication were very poor. It later turned out he got erroneous information.

When it came to Virginia, the roll call was interrupted, and this set the precedent for what Estes tried to do later in this convention and Mr. Sam absolutely refused to allow him to do, namely, to interrupt the roll call, even though the precedent had been previously set in this convention.

Prior to the time to vote, Blair Moody had come to talk to the California caucus, and to explain to them what was involved here, and how important it was, and that he hoped that California would back this the whole way. I believe our decision was that if Estes was for the loyalty oath, we would gladly vote for it, but we felt we should get an expression of opinion from him, and that was true of practically all the other Kefauver caucuses to which Blair went. I worked closely with Blair Moody, and we became good friends.

Shirpser: There was a small meeting at Estes' headquarters. This was a building right alongside the Amphitheater. I think they called it the Sportsman's Palace or some such name, where all the candidates had their headquarters. George Miller went and I went to represent California. I'm not sure how I got there--maybe the others weren't available at that particular point. I was thrilled to be invited to this high policy, small meeting with Estes. I didn't say anything at first, because I didn't think I was experienced enough to try to influence Estes. Estes did then what became a pattern for later meetings with him, as I knew them: He would listen to everybody; he'd let everybody talk--the pros and the cons. Gael Sullivan, his campaign manager, said to him, "Estes, you cannot come out for this loyalty oath. You are from the South. If you do this, you're throwing away the presidency of the United States. For God sake, don't support the loyalty oath." Many of the seasoned politicians with him said he mustn't do it--he'd incur the enmity of the Southern states' delegates. He must come out against the loyalty oath.

They went around the room asking each delegate and committee chairman, and when they came to me and asked me what I thought, I said, "I don't feel experienced enough to try to advise you, Senator, but I'm for 'the misnamed loyalty oath.' I don't see how you can come to a convention and not abide by the majority vote. It seems to me that everything that you have done in the past--the way you have gone directly to the people in primary elections, that you have demonstrated that you believe in the will of the majority, and that is really what this loyalty oath is all about." I said very little, because I didn't feel that I was qualified.

Chall: But you said quite a bit in what you said.

Shirpser: I said further, "I believe that our delegation is for the loyalty oath, but they want to be guided by your decision."

Then, Estes said, "Now, let me think." He walked up and down, and if ever I saw a man in agony, it was Estes. You could see what this meant to him. Look how hard he'd worked, look at the rigors he'd endured through all those primary elections, the rebuffs he'd had at this convention, the terrible lack of any consideration for him. In the Gorman book, it said, and I know this to be true, that not only were President Truman, Sam Rayburn, Jake Arvey, and the whole convention management against him, the Kefauver managers couldn't get the list of delegates

Shirpser: from the Democratic National Committee! They were entitled to those lists of delegates; they were entitled to know where they were staying and how to reach them.

Frank McKinney was a long-time "Truman man," behind the scenes. He gave "the word" which was supposed to be: "Stop Kefauver at every point. Just don't cooperate with him." Here, Estes was faced with this tremendous decision, where principle was involved, where integrity was involved, and where everything he'd worked for might go down the drain, if he did what he believed was right.

His pacing and thinking seemed endless, although it probably wasn't more than a few minutes. Estes had a very keen analytical mind and he was weighing the assets and the liabilities, and he was well aware of the importance of his decision. Finally, he came back and said to us, in effect: All my life I have tried to do what I believed was right. I think it is right that anyone who comes to this convention should go home and put the nominee of this convention--whoever he is--and at this point it doesn't appear to me it's going to be me. But whoever it is, if it's a person I can accept, I will support him; I will work for him. I have more at stake, surely, than any person in this whole place. If I can do this, so can all of you. I'm not quoting him, obviously, but this was the gist of what he said. He said, "I'm going to be for the loyalty oath. Go back to your delegations and tell them and work for support from other delegations, too.

This was "the kiss of death," as it turned out. Yet I believe this was carefully thought out by Estes, and that Estes was doing what he always had done and supporting what he believed to be right. It took great courage and selfless integrity.

Chall: This oath was really a decision that had been made by a committee of the National Committee; it would be presumed that the National Committee was for it, and it was not supposed to be an issue of whether a candidate stood for it or not?

Shirpser: Yes, but it turned out to be the crux of the convention, and influenced the southern delegates against supporting Estes. They considered it a betrayal of the honor of the southern states.

Chall: Is that because Jake Arvey made a decision to use it as such?

Shirpser: What happened in the convention, as I remember it, was along these lines: regardless of which nominee they supported, the

Shirpser: liberal Northern, and Western states, and many Eastern states were voting for the loyalty oath, and the majority vote was piling up. Suddenly, Illinois--where Adlai was for the loyalty oath, and the Illinois delegation was for the loyalty oath--Arvey, somehow through his power and influence, told them if they continued to vote for the loyalty oath, Estes would get the nomination.

It was unbelievable but Illinois suddenly switched, and voted against the loyalty oath. Those Illinois delegates were all over the floor, and they got other states to switch too, until finally the loyalty oath was defeated. What political machinations went on, what the promises, what deals were made, I can't tell you. But Arvey was the kingpin of defeating the loyalty oath--which was accepted in the 1956 convention--the next convention.*

But this loyalty oath contest was used, after Estes came out for it, as another device to beat him--and Arvey and the Illinois delegation used their votes in this way--not whether they were for the loyalty oath as they had previously stated, but as a weapon to "stop Kefauver."

The Power of "Mr. Sam" Rayburn

Shirpser: As I look back over the convention, I don't believe Estes could have won anyway, and I'm proud of him for doing what he believed was right to support the loyalty oath; which was later adopted. He was simply ahead of his time in so many fields, and he had courage and integrity beyond that of many political leaders, and this is what made him a great man. With President Truman and Sam Rayburn so opposed to Estes, and all their power and influences, and all the tricks that were used, I doubt that Estes could have gotten that nomination. I think this was a boss-ridden convention to an extent that no one could get the nomination except the man that President Truman, Sam Rayburn, Frank McKinney, and Jake Arvey wanted. They knew all the parliamentary devices; they could not even listen to you unless you supported their conclusion.

You know, when California was called on roll call vote, poor George had been trying to say something every hour of every day and had rarely been able to get Mr. Sam to turn on the mike

*The 1956 convention supported a moderately worded resolution--not called the "loyalty oath" this time (which so offended the southern delegates in 1952), but which carried out the basic points outlined in the so-called "loyalty oath." C.S.

Shirpser: so George could be heard. Sometimes California brought their banners right down in front of Mr. Sam and they'd wave them back and forth and yell, "We want to make a motion. We have a resolution." Mr. Sam would act as if they weren't there; he refused to see them.

I really hated that man. Later I got to know him and to like him--I could not resist him. He gave me much good advice; he always called me "Miss Clara," and he said I was one of the most sincere and able people he'd known, and he wanted to help me to succeed in my position as Democratic National Committee-woman. When you can get help and advice from a man as powerful as that, it would be foolish to continue to hate him!

George, when we finally were called on during a roll, would say, "California wants to state--" and Mr. Sam would say, "Oh, you're not ready to answer the roll call, are you, Mr. Miller--California passes." Our delegation never could talk to the convention--it was simply maddening! George was jumping up and down in absolute rage, and so was the whole delegation much of the time. All we ever did was just vote; we rarely could speak or state our position--it was awful.

Chall: Was California the biggest Kefauver delegation there?

Shirpser: Oh yes.

Chall: So, whatever it did had a certain amount of power that he didn't want wielded.

Shirpser: Yes. They didn't want to let us do anything or say anything that would help Estes.

Chall: Of course, you've read what Arvey said--that when the loyalty oath vote was going so well he believed that Kefauver apparently had planned it this way, so that the Southern delegates would then walk out, and that would leave Estes with great strength on the floor. That apparently doesn't make sense to you.

Shirpser: I sincerely believe that this was not true. I was there at that small policy meeting, and I heard what Estes said, and never was there one word to that effect. No one could have told what was going to happen on the floor. This was an official resolution that was supported by everyone except, as far as I remember, a few Southern states. Those few states walking out wouldn't have made any appreciable difference. It was just Arvey's way of covering up his machinations, because he went against what

- Shirpser: Adlai wanted, went against what his own delegation wanted. He was simply carrying out whatever orders he was given--or maybe he initiated the orders--I don't know. But that was the turning point. After Illinois, Adlai's home state, voted against it, it was assumed Adlai was against it.
- Chall: Were you aware, when that vote switch came, that your candidate was in greater danger than he already had been?
- Shirpser: Of course. We understood how important this was; we caucused, and we made plans.

Clara's Resolution on Demonstrations

- Shirpser: Finally, I came up with this desperate plan we had talked about on the train coming to the convention, and I introduced the resolution to the delegation caucus.
- Chall: You were trying to introduce a resolution that dealt with parades on the floor, is that right? That's what you had considered on the train?
- Shirpser: The most important part of it was to use the time saved to bring the man seeking the nomination to the podium to speak to the delegates. We also thought that this would help Senator Kefauver.
- Chall: Why did you decide to do it at the particular time that you chose?
- Shirpser: I think the main point of it was that we felt the television time could be used more valuably. Our resolution was to restrict the parades to fifteen minutes for each candidate. Now, we were realists enough to know that we couldn't make it stick to stop completely in fifteen minutes. But at least it wouldn't go on for an hour as it usually did. The chairman, Mr. Sam, would try to get them back to their seats. We thought that this time saved would not only reduce the circus atmosphere, but each candidate who got a certain proportion of the vote would come before the convention.

Now, it isn't generally realized, but a lot of delegates had not even met their candidate--particularly that was true of Stevenson. It was not so true of Estes because he had done so

Shirpser: much grassroots campaigning; but Harriman hadn't, and Russell [Richard] hadn't. We felt that if each of them were given fifteen minutes to come before the convention to discuss the issues, it would not only give the delegates a chance to really know what their candidate stood for, beyond what they read in the papers or in pamphlets handed to them, but it would also give the television-viewing audience that exposure which was so hard for Democratic candidates to get, because we never had the funds to match the Republican party. We said something like, "California will never yield in its ability to yell and holler and put on a show in the parades, as much as any other delegation here, but is this the best way to use television time?"

I think that our resolution was carefully thought-out and convincingly worded, and the majority of our delegates voted for it. George Miller was completely opposed to it; he got up and spoke against it in the most vehement terms. He said, "You'll get 'A' for deportment, but you'll ruin Estes' chances." John Anson Ford was for it.

Chall: And you were concerned about these parades that would take place during and after nominations, on the day when there were going to be nominations and ballots?

Shirpser: Yes, before the nominations.

Incidentally, Adlai Stevenson came on the convention floor and sat with the Illinois delegation in the 1956 convention as Estes had with his elderly father in 1952, and nobody thought that was such a terrible thing for Adlai to do--he won the nomination.

But, you see, no matter what Estes did, it was loaded against him. So we thought this was one way to bring him before the convention--that he would say effectively the things that delegates and the television audience needed to hear. It wasn't just that we thought it would help him; it was that we thought this was the best way for the Democratic party, too. We didn't want to make the same mistakes the Republicans had made, and we felt that using television time...I had already discussed this with some of the press people; and some of the TV people, because I had a very good and helpful relationship with them. They all thought my plan was a good idea. The more practical people, like Joe de Silva, who was head of the Retail Clerks in California, said that you couldn't stop this exuberance--it was good, it was an outlet, people liked to

Shirpsen: yell and holler, and we weren't in a college classroom or the League of Women Voters--we were at a political convention, and so on. I was always getting that thrown at me my background in the League of Women Voters.

Our own caucus did vote for it. George continued to oppose it so strongly that I knew we were going to have trouble, but the majority ruled. I said that, before bringing this resolution before the convention, I would try to get in touch with Estes and with Gael Sullivan and see what they thought about it. If they had thought it was a good idea, I would go to the chairman of the Rules Committee and notify them that we had this resolution to introduce, because we had to get their clearance to introduce the resolution.

I never even stopped to think of the terror that would assail me when I faced that whole convention--I was so wrapped up in this--you forget self, really. That happened to me on television appearances over and over again. I was scared to death--how I was going to look, what I was going to say--and then when I got into the heart of what I was doing, it was so important to me to do as well as I could, I forgot about myself.

Several of the delegates went with me, and we did get to Estes, and Estes said, 'Well, I'm desperate; anything we can do that would help, let's do. I think it's a good idea.' So did Gael Sullivan, his national campaign manager. We raced across town to the chairman of the Rules Committee, and he notified Sam Rayburn that we would be doing it at a given and appropriate time. When that time came, I tried to get on the platform, with about ten delegates pushing ahead of me clearing space for me in the aisles.

The press, as soon as they saw us going forward, wanted to know what was going on--and so Don Thomas from the Oakland Tribune, Squire [Earl] Behrens, political editor of the Chronicle, Vernon O'Reilly, who was with the San Francisco Call-Bulletin, all tried to help to get us up there. We went to the rear of the platform. We banged; the gate was locked; we yelled; we sent up the resolution to Sam Rayburn, the chairman on the platform; we sent up the okay from the Rules Committee. Sam Rayburn wouldn't let me on the platform. He wouldn't let our resolution come before the convention; he absolutely ignored and broke all the convention rules. He had no authority as chairman to stop this resolution, which had been properly introduced and cleared by the Rules Committee. He just wouldn't let us do it.

Shirpser: George Miller was delighted. He said he was going to get up there and fight it if I tried to give it. He couldn't have, but that would have been nice, wouldn't it? [Laughter] But, he couldn't have, because I had a document, where a majority of the delegates, had signed their names which stated that if he got up and tried to oppose our resolution, they would immediately vote for a caucus and we'd have to leave the floor in the midst of everything and caucus. The majority were for this resolution, and you can't stop a majority of the delegation--even the chairman can't.

Well, anyway this was one more frustration.

Rules of the Convention

Chall: I notice that frequently you talk about something being illegal, unconstitutional--"it is against all the rules." I have a feeling that there are no such things, really, as rules of a convention--

Shirpser: Yes, there are!

Chall: I know; I've seen the little booklet that you have in your files, but they seem to be broached in such a way that they can be revised on the spot, and it's pretty hard to make sure that a rule is really a rule.

Shirpser: It depends on the chairman. The chairman is really in charge; he's almost a dictator. He can do pretty much what he wants. Many of our chairmen at later conventions were objective and fair and conducted the convention according to the rules which would govern it. But there are rules--like the one I mentioned regarding the badges and passes and to get the Rules Committee consent to bring up a resolution. Now, I don't know whether you've seen that book--but there is a definite set of rules established for each convention, through the Rules Committee, and that governs the Democratic convention. In general they are pretty much the same rules for each convention. In other words, if you go before a committee, you speak to a resolution, the committee has to vote for it or against it, and if you don't like their decision, you get enough signatures so you can bring it to the floor for a fight.

Shirpser: There are definite rules of procedure--it would be a mob otherwise, not a convention. When I say it's illegal, I mean it's illegal in terms of the rules which the Democratic National Committee had set up for itself. The Democratic National Committee is the governing body of the party. They control, supposedly, the convention--and in 1952, they surely did control it.

Chall: Yes, but they broke all the rules.

Shirpser: Not quite all of the rules! When rules are broken it is the fault of the people in charge of the convention, usually. Of course, I had no part in setting up those rules, because I wasn't a member then.

Adlai Stevenson is Nominated

Shirpser: Estes led on the first ballot, and he gained perhaps twenty-five votes on the second ballot. Then on the third ballot is where the bandwagon started rolling for Stevenson.

It was a terrible day; it started early in the morning and went on and on and on. Estes had one defeat after another that day. Finally, he left his room at his headquarters and came to the convention--with Senator Paul Douglas, who was one of the most respected and beloved men who ever served as a U.S. senator, I think. To know him as a dear friend was really a great privilege and joy. He was for Stevenson originally, and then because of all Estes' liberal and progressive positions on important issues, Paul came out for Estes. I have his statement at the time.

Chall: Yes, and it's quoted, I think, in the Gorman book.

Shirpser: It undoubtedly is. In this he told why he was for Kefauver, and he fought for him all through that convention, and he was probably our most valuable asset at the convention. Remember he was from Illinois, the home state of Adlai Stevenson.

When Estes realized that he could not possibly win, he met with Paul Douglas, and the two of them decided that they would try to interrupt the third roll call and to withdraw in favor of Adlai. This was a sensible thing to do, and would save hours

Shirpser: of time during the long, exhausting roll call.

Chall: At this point Adlai Stevenson had told the convention that he would be a candidate, so that changed the convention entirely. And this is the third ballot--rather late in the day, I understand.

Shirpser: Yes, it was probably eleven or twelve o'clock at night, by the time that came about. Many of the states that had been for Kefauver started switching to Stevenson, and Estes realized what was going to happen, and I think he wanted the good will that would accrue to him by withdrawing in favor of Stevenson.

He and Paul Douglas--you know they were both very tall men--Estes was 6'4", and Douglas was probably 6'2"--and they were walking down the long aisle, so erect and straight, both of them. They were both well-groomed, and didn't look exhausted and dishevelled. They started walking up the aisle, and it caused a sensation! None of us knew why they were doing that; we suspected it would be to withdraw, but we didn't really know. They went around the back of the platform and entered. We saw them sit down. We saw Estes get up and try to speak and he was immediately denied the privilege of speaking.

In the letter which Estes later sent his delegates... You see, no one on the floor knew what was happening really, because it was a decision made at the moment. But we could see the expression on his face, and the fact that he stood up and tried to speak, and had to go sit down again, that he was being humiliated.

There was a precedent for interrupting a roll call, but Chairman Sam Rayburn ruled that you couldn't interrupt a roll call. Well, you see, he had interrupted the roll call on the Virginia fight, and so a rule that applies the day before, certainly should apply that day too, but he didn't let Estes speak.

I'd like to read part of the letter [Senator Kefauver's] here: "Shortly before the beginning of the third roll call, it became obvious that I could not secure the nomination myself, and that Governor Stevenson would be nominated; then Averell Harriman withdrew in favor of Governor Stevenson. Governor Devers of Massachusetts announced that they would be for Stevenson, and the intention of several other delegations to switch to him, convinced me of the inevitability of my defeat.

Shirpser: About that time, I saw my old and dear friend, Senator Paul Douglas. Through the months, he's made a most personal and political sacrifice to stand by me loyally. I wanted to make a gesture of friendship and appreciation to him, and we had to act fast. We started over to the convention hall, but because of time lost en route in traffic and talking with the press and pushing through the crowd, we didn't get there until the roll was being called." (He'd intended to get there before the roll had started.) "It was my intention to release all the delegates voting for me, and to withdraw my own candidacy, and as an expression of affection, go through the formality of nominating Senator Douglas."

Chall: Oh.

Shirpser: "It was his (Paul Douglas) intention to refuse to be nominated, and then he would give his support to Governor Stevenson. I felt this would help bring unity to the party, heal many political wounds, and result in a greatly deserved ovation for Senator Douglas. Even though the roll was being called, we felt certain that the chairman would recognize us for this purpose, inasmuch as the roll call had been interrupted the previous day to discuss the seating of the Virginia delegates. Since we were denied recognition, it was impossible to carry out our plan. Much confusion developed among our delegations, who had no way of knowing what we intended to do, but split-second decisions had to be made, and we could not advise them beforehand.

"I shall always be eternally grateful for the friendship and loyalty of the delegations and the individual members who supported me so magnificently to the very end against the greatest odds."

Then he went on to say that he wanted his delegates to continue to work together for the principles he believed in and the ideals of the Democratic party. "We fought a hard, clean fight without compromise, without deals, and I'm sure history will record the worthiness of our effort and purpose. Though we lost the nomination, Nancy and I have no regrets. We made millions of friends, and increased confidence in the noble spirit and the greatness of the American people."

Chall: When did he write that letter?

Shirpser: July 29, 1952. It went to all his delegates. He also said in a press article that it was the greatest humiliation of his life

Shirpser: having to sit there for two hours when all he wanted to do was to unite the Democratic party, and withdraw, and save that two-hour roll call, which went on until one or two in the morning.

Even Arvey said later that it had been a great mistake that Rayburn had not allowed him to do this. It would have helped to unite the party; Stevenson would have liked them to have done it, and even Illinois would have liked him to do it.

Chall: It would have made it possible for everyone to see it--those who were still watching on television.

Shirpser: That's right--they lost the bulk of their TV audience. At two in the morning, very few people are looking.

Chall: Do you feel that Stevenson was the only person who could have united the party, as it is claimed--that Kefauver could not have united the party, that he wouldn't have won even if the rules had all been played fairly?

Shirpser: I think he might have won that convention; I really do.

Chall: He could have won the nomination, if they had played according to the rules.

Shirpser: Yes, well, you have to believe that, because he had a large majority when he went into the convention, and if President Truman hadn't been so implacably opposed to him, then I don't believe Mr. Rayburn or Jake Arvey, or Frank McKinney, or the National Committee members would have dared do the things they did. But with the president urging them on, obviously the prestige of the incumbent president is great.

Remember that Estes had beaten him in the New Hampshire primary. Mr. Truman was on that ticket, and Estes beat him there, and this isn't easy for a president to accept, and President Truman then withdrew. President Truman was resentful about that, and also the fact that several of his good friends and cronies had been proved, through the Kefauver Investigating Committee, to have a close alliance with the underworld, and some had been defeated when running for reelection. Mr. Truman did not forgive or forget.

I have to believe that, even in the light of two later conventions, that a man entering with such a large majority should be able to win. He did not get more on the second ballot, but it wasn't until all the things I've spoken of happened, that the third ballot showed he was going to lose, and he decided to withdraw.

Heavyhearted Kefauver Supporters

Shirpser: When we got back to our rooms late that night, we found a mimeographed sheet inviting us to breakfast the next morning with the Kefauvers. We went to the breakfast thinking Estes just wanted to say goodbye to us.

Chall: You must have all been rather heartsick.

Shirpser: Oh, we were the most bedraggled, unhappy, depressed group--everybody's head was bowed, I think. We were in such a state of exhaustion, I don't believe we were even thinking. Then we came to this breakfast and Estes was there, looking tired, of course, and he got up and he said, "This is my birthday, and it's a happy birthday because you've all been so wonderful." Every man and woman in that place started crying! Everyone was sobbing--the men as much as the women. It's one of the few times in all the years we were married that I saw Ad cry. It was just unendurable that Estes could be so gallant, so cheerful after what he'd been through! What a birthday present he received!

Gorman made another error in his book about Kefauver when he wrote that Estes' forty-ninth birthday was ignored by his delegates.

Well, it was an early morning breakfast, and only devotion to Estes would have gotten us out of bed to attend that breakfast meeting. He talked to us there, and urged us in the most good-sportsmanlike way I've ever heard to work for Adlai--that Adlai Stevenson was a wonderful man, that Estes was going to work for him--he had already called him and congratulated him and told him he was willing to do anything to help. He'd go out campaigning; anything he could do to help, he was going to do.

We thought this was wonderful, because a lot of us weren't resolved at that stage. But I must say that Adlai's acceptance speech was an inspiration. After I heard that, a great many of my doubts vanished, because I didn't know yet how much he was responsible for what Jake Arvey did there. Later, when I got to know Adlai well (because I wouldn't dare tell him these things unless I'd had an established bond with him, for fear he'd think that I was making them up--before he learned to trust me) I told him some of the experiences we'd had there at the 1952 convention, and he was shocked! He'd had no idea

Shirpser: that the nomination had been gotten for him the way it was secured.

I keep referring to the fact that it was a miracle that we got a man like Stevenson, who I think is one of the greatest men who ever lived, and for whom I'll never cease to have the deepest respect, admiration, and affection. It's just incredible to me that from such a convention could come a great man like Adlai. I sent him a wire immediately, and told him that I wanted to help in every way; that I had been deeply moved by his speech accepting the nomination.

We heard later (John Anson Ford and I) that George Miller had phoned Adlai and made an appointment with him, and spent an hour and a half with him, and he took a couple of his friends with him. But he didn't ask John Anson Ford or me to go along. Since, in the National Committee rules, the management of the presidential campaign is supposed to be in the hands of the Democratic National Committee members, it was an insulting omission. Both John and I felt badly about it, because, obviously, we would have liked to meet Adlai and talk to him, explain what some of our problems were in California and try to develop some sort of working arrangement. But George preferred to do it on his own, which was typical of him.

In fact, after we got back, and we came to the state convention, a great many delegates told the press that they no longer wanted to support George Miller for state chairman because of the way he functioned as a "one-man team." He always thought he knew best; he didn't want to be guided by any of the older, more experienced members--he never conferred with them. He was often rude, and shouted at them. He was not an easy man to get along with, [laughter] as I found out.

I'd like to tell you one more incident regarding Estes: After the breakfast, where every one of us was sniffing and red eyed and sad as we walked out, Estes was being interviewed by the press in the corridor where we had to pass them. As I got opposite him, he put both hands out and stopped me. I looked at him and started to cry again! I said, "I just can't bear it." He said, "Listen, boys, I want you to meet Clara. She's going to be a great national committeewoman. She's one of my best and dearest friends. No one's done more for me or done it with greater sincerity and loyalty than Clara. I think she's wonderful." And so I started to cry again! I went out of there dissolved in tears. How could he be so thoughtful and considerate of me at a time like this!

- Chall: I often wonder how the candidates manage to handle themselves in times like this. Everyone is physically and emotionally drained, and anything that happens, whether it's good or bad, is a terrible experience.
- Shirpsers: We were so confident when we went to that convention, that the letdown was even worse. We weren't cynical; you don't think things like that can happen. You just think if the people want your candidate, he's got to win.
- Chall: Now, his breakfast was for all the Kefauver delegates throughout the United States?
- Shirpsers: Only those who stayed loyal to him came, of course. Those who switched--I don't think many of them showed up. [Laughs] Several didn't come because they were physically and emotionally exhausted.

The California Delegation

- Chall: Then many of the delegates did vote for Kefauver on the third ballot, since he had not withdrawn?
- Shirpsers: Yes, but not a large number. California stayed a hundred percent for Kefauver.
- Chall: It was those delegates, then, who came to his party.
- Shirpsers: I think he must have invited everybody. I wouldn't have, if I were they, would you? I don't see how they could have faced him.
- Chall: Well, that certainly gave an opportunity to prove loyalty, if nothing else.
- Shirpsers: Yes. That you could say for us: we were loyal.
- Chall: Was there any caucusing or consideration in that third ballot, in the California delegation, for making a switch?
- Shirpsers: Many people came to our delegation, of course, from other delegations and said, "Get on the bandwagon. Kefauver's not going to win. You know he isn't. Be sensible."

Chall: Yes, I think that would happen.

Shirpser: But, it was such a small group of dissidents, and the large majority of us felt that principle was at stake. After all, Estes had won by a tremendous number of votes in California, and then, as now, it was "winner take all," the delegate votes. We all received a large number of wires and letters, some special delivery. They were flooding in from California, "Stay faithful to Estes." Certainly, I never would have changed. I'm sure that George wouldn't have, or John Anson Ford, or Jimmy Roosevelt, or the vast majority of our delegation. All of us thought that we were there to do a job, we'd done it the best we could, and we were going to stay with it to the end.

Chall: You weren't bound by unit rule, though, so various delegates could have--

Shirpser: Yes, we were bound by unit rule. I don't think that's a very good idea. I think it's not very democratic to have to vote differently than you want to vote, and I believe the unit rule has been rescinded in most states now. But we still have the winner-take-all feature in California.

Chall: So that caucusing must have been rather hot and heavy between the second and the third ballot particularly.

Shirpser: Yes, but it was such an enormous majority that wanted to stay with Estes that there was no real question of switching. George did say in a later statement that he was proud of California. We never wavered. We stayed with Estes; we were there to help him; we were terribly distressed we hadn't been able to do better, but at least we could be loyal, and we were.

Estes appreciated that. You know, that's one of the things I think is bad about Professor Gorman's book: it is so sectional. All he seems to know about is the South--Tennessee, where Estes came from. Do you know in his book he didn't even mention the California delegation. Now, Estes realized this was his most important victory when he won the California primary. This gave him more prestige than any other victory. He had beaten the regular party slate, about three to one! The California delegation was his biggest delegation; it was his most faithful delegation, and we didn't get one word of recognition in that Gorman book.

Shirpser: I think that Gorman gave a superficial analysis of what happened if he didn't realize the importance of the California delegation. I'm not saying this because I'm from California; I'm really being objective about it. He mentions other states like Michigan and Oregon, and, important as they were, it is very strange that the most important state to Estes doesn't even rate a mention in that book.

He didn't come to California to interview anybody as far as I know. The western states are part of the union, and we were very important to Kefauver. So I don't see how a book on Kefauver can have such big gaps that the people that Estes considered most important to him weren't even mentioned, nor was the state.

Chall: It's good that your material will go into the archives.

Shirpser: I did have the deepest personal ties to Estes and especially as the years went by. I was closer and closer to him. Do we have time to say anything about the press?

Chall: Yes, I'd like you to discuss the press, and I'd also like to have you put on the record your opinions about Gael Sullivan. I notice that Gorman has quoted Mrs. Ragland's [Martha] opinion of Gael Sullivan, and that's all...

Shirpser: I didn't know him well. Anything I say about him has to be a last minute thing. He came and spoke to us, of course, and so did the Senator and Nancy and his family, whenever they could. Gael was an excellent speaker, and a very attractive and dynamic person. But we didn't have very close contact with him. He didn't come to us often enough.

As a new delegation, we really needed much more guidance than we got. It was too bad, because I think Gael Sullivan was a capable person. In getting the resolution to the platform--since he thought it was a good idea, I realized later he should have come with me. He should have known how to get on the platform; instead of just sending me off with the California delegates, and some of the members of the press--the political editors--to try to get up there. Maybe if he himself had gone, it might have...I don't know what the resolution would have accomplished.

We didn't get much help from him; we didn't get to know him well. So I don't really know how effective he was for Estes

Shirpser: nationally. I know he gave up a very important post to help Estes. Estes thought the world of him. I'm not sure how much political experience he'd had, either. So I can't evaluate him fairly.

The Press

Chall: Well, then we can talk about the press.

Shirpser: From the beginning, I somehow established a good relationship with the press which was most valuable to me. I think I was a new experience for most of them. You see, they were used to dealing with more seasoned politicians who'd be very cautious about what they said. I was warned by them to be careful.

I remember in Fresno, the morning after I got elected, Vernon O'Reilly came over and sat down and talked to me, and he said, "Now, look. You're coming into the toughest game in the world. And you've got the top post in the state of California. Do you realize you're the spokesman for the California Democratic party?" I said, "You know, I find that is intimidating." He said, "No, it needn't be. But I just want you to realize how important this post can be if you make it so, and your relationship with the press is one of the most important things you'll ever have. You're newsworthy. Any time you want to say something, send us a press release. But, be careful. If you want to call me and ask my advice on something and say it's off the record, I'll keep it off the record." "But," he said, "others may not. You may have a lot of problems, because you are going into a field where the press can make or break you." I appreciated his advice. I remembered what he said, and it was most helpful to me.

Then I got to know Squire Behrens well and Don Thomas. With Knowland the editor of the Tribune, I had very little in common. But all of these political editors became friends, and gave me advice and help. Several times they even called me and told me things they thought I ought to know, which was most exceptional and valuable to me. On the other hand, I tried to be frank--they all said that. Even Larry Davis from the New York Times, who was out here reporting, wrote me after he gave up the post, that whenever he called me I was never evasive or

Shirpser: less than frank, and gave him the information he needed. When I asked him, "Can I keep this off the record?", he thought it was most refreshing that I would trust him to that extent, and he never broke that trust. I thought that was fine, and this was true of many of the political reporters. Later, Mary Ellen Leary and Ruth Finney were wonderfully helpful to me.

On the other hand, I had trouble with other reporters. For instance, just to show you how something you say can be misinterpreted and how you can be hurt. When we were in Fresno, having a convention of the delegates--I think it was in '56 when I was supporting Kefauver, and Stevenson was running in California. This was one of the most difficult parts of my whole life, because I wanted to support both of them so badly. I said, in introducing Estes (in this Fresno convention of our delegates) that I was sorry that Nancy hadn't been able to come with him on this trip, how much we wanted her, what a great asset she was, because she was charming, friendly, she could speak well when called upon. I even mentioned what someone had said--that she was "his secret weapon--"

The next day, in the San Francisco Examiner, I read with deep resentment that Clint Mosher had written in his article, to the effect that Clara Shirpser, Democratic National Committee-woman for California, who is known for her idealism--even she made a derogatory allusion to Adlai Stevenson being divorced, when she gave so much praise to Nancy Kefauver as an asset to Kefauver's campaign.

I immediately wrote to Mr. Mosher, protesting, and sent an immediate letter to Adlai Stevenson explaining and quoting from the speech I had made regarding Nancy. I assured him of my deep regard for him and that I would never hurt him, though I was supporting Estes.

V THE GENERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN, 1952
(Interview 5, July 7, 1972)

Chall: I thought that we would start with the activities after the convention of 1952. Did the National Committee meet?

Shirpser: It did meet in Denver, yes, shortly after the convention adjourned.

Chall: What happened immediately after the convention?

Shirpser: I was on some television programs when I got back. I received a wire stating that Nixon might be on the program with me. With some trepidation, I accepted, but he later cancelled. Maybe I'll talk about TV and we can put the press in there.

Chall: Could I first find out: Is there a process after a convention at which you are formally selected as national committeewoman?

Shirpser: Yes, at the close of the convention there is a National Committee meeting, which is just a formality, to actually put into office the new National Committee members. The usual procedure is that the outgoing ones introduce his or her successor. In this case Ellie Heller wasn't there, so I was formally installed; but it was a perfunctory sort of thing.

Chall: I see. There's really no challenge to the committee selection at this stage?

Shirpser: There sometimes is, but that contest goes to the Credentials Committee, and it's usually settled before the National Committee meets.

Chall: So then you're ready to come back and begin the work in the campaign.

Shirpser: Yes.

Shirpser: I also have some information about what it's like to be national committeewoman. I don't know if you want to bring it in at this point.

Selection of George Miller, Jr. as State Committee Chairman

Chall: Today I'd like to talk primarily about the 1952 campaign.

Shirpser: All right. Before that, we have to get to the convention in Sacramento, where George Miller gets to be state chairman.

Chall: When did that take place?

Shirpser: The Democratic State Central Committee Convention took place very shortly after our return--

Chall: Oh, I thought it took place after an election.

Shirpser: Oh, no, you have to have a state chairman to handle the campaign. Let's see--it was July 29, 1952, and we had come back from the convention then, earlier in July.

Chall: This is the State Central Committee Convention then. Who was there?

Shirpser: Right after we returned from the Democratic National Convention, George Miller discussed with me his wish to be state chairman, and I pledged him my support. At that time he offered to share offices with me, and to share the rental, etc. Before I left for Sacramento Ellie Heller, the former national committeewoman, had told me she would turn over the office lease to me and the office furniture--desks and some files--which was a tremendous help. This was a suite of offices she had occupied at the Balboa Building, located very well on Market Street, one block from the Palace Hotel. Her offices were on the second floor. She had had these two offices and the waiting room where the secretary was, and she occupied the whole suite. She had had a couple of paid employees, which must have made life easy and harmonious for her. George and I agreed that we would share everything. He would have one office and I the other office, and we would share the secretary who would sit in the middle office where people entered.

Shirpser: Shortly after our return from the national convention, I called Mrs. Heller and told her how much I appreciated all the fine things she had done for me, which really had made the convention a far more significant experience for me. Ellie's cooperation gave me the right to vote, too, so I was very grateful to her. I told her some of what we'd gone through, and she was tremendously interested. I think I took her to lunch and gave her a blow-by-blow description.

A few days later she called me and she said she had decided to support a man, whom she named, as the next Democratic state chairman. I had met him, and liked him. Ellie asked me to support him. This put me in a terrible quandary. George Miller had been the chairman of the Kefauver delegation, and I had worked closely with him all through the difficult experiences at the convention. He wanted to be state chairman, and as chairman of the Kefauver delegation, it seemed to me, that he had the right to my support, and I had pledged him my support. I explained this to Ellie and also the plans to share offices. She talked to me at some length. She was quite resentful of the fact that I wouldn't cooperate with her. I said if I had known earlier perhaps I could have, but obviously I should be loyal to the man who had been the chairman of the Kefauver delegation. Besides, I had already pledged him my support. So she said something to the effect that I'd regret it very much, and she did say, "George is not the sort of person we would like as chairman."

I already had had a lot of evidence pointing that way, and if I had been free, I really don't know what I would have done. It seemed that loyalty dictated I stay with George Miller and I probably would have done it. Of course, the fact that "I would regret it," I also took to mean that she was angry with me, and that we'd no longer have this congenial and helpful relationship--which made me feel very badly because she had been wonderfully good to me, and I was appreciative.

But Ellie was a person who liked power, and she was very good to people who cooperated with her, but she also expected you to follow her lead, and I simply couldn't do it in this instance.

Chall: Can you tell me who it was that she was backing?

Shirpser: I think his name was Roland Davis. At the Sacramento convention, George won by a substantial majority. But he didn't win easily.

Chall: Was Roland Davis a competitor?

Shirpser: Yes, the leading competitor.

Chall: Was he backed, then, by what you call the "regulars" of the Democratic party?

Shirpser: Yes. Ellie Heller worked very closely with William (Bill) Malone, and in the newspaper it says often "the Heller-Malone faction" or the "Heller-Malone old-guard faction," and things of this sort--phrases that I don't use. Bill Malone, as state chairman, was very much influenced by Mrs. Heller, and it gave her a great deal of power in making recommendations, such as who would be the next state chairman, and for federal judgeships, and many other posts--because this is one of the functions of the National Committee members.

People write to them and say they would like to see so-and-so appointed to such-and-such post, and if it's someone that you can support, you write to the head of the committee which is making the appointment, and it often does carry a good deal of weight. Naturally, if he gets the post, he's very loyal to you, and if you later ask something of him--you know, this is the way it works. Although it didn't work very often that way in my case--I must admit.

I just want to read a couple of clippings from the San Francisco News, which were written by Vernon O'Reilly. He states: "A meeting of Democratic delegates, who were not happy with the Miller candidacy, continued far into the night here." (That was in Sacramento, during the Democratic State Convention.) "Before the meeting, spokesmen for the group, who refuse to be quoted directly, said the name of Sam Gardner of Marin County might be thrown into nomination against Miller. The reason for this move was said to be that many of the Kefauver-pledged delegation to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago were disappointed with the way Miller handled the delegation. They claim Miller had offended many delegates far outranking him in seniority and party effectiveness, and definitely more experienced.

"These offenses, it was charged, ranged from failure to seek counsel with the experienced members of the delegation, to brusque, sometimes profane brush-offs of some of them. 'Miller created the impression in Chicago that nobody knew anything except George Miller. We feel serious mistakes were made that could have been avoided had there been a modicum of

Shirpser: consultation with more-experienced people in the delegation. The net result is that, although some of us had pledged to support him for state chairman before we went to Chicago, we now feel serious doubts as to his ability to fill the job of state chairman."

I didn't say any of those things. I was asked to join with this dissident group, and I didn't do so. I had promised to support George and I always kept my word, though I realized more and more how difficult it would be to work well with George.

Chall: Now this dissident group, would they have been favoring the Heller faction, or was this a sincere feeling on their part about Miller? They weren't being motivated by William Malone?

Shirpser: No, it wasn't a stop-Miller movement as much as a desire to get someone they felt would do the job more effectively, such as a highly-qualified man as Sam Gardner, who was one of the best members of the Kefauver delegation, and who was, I think "available" for state chairman.

Chall: Did you agree with them, but refuse to...

Shirpser: Well, I had pledged my word to George Miller. I had come to the delegation late; I had not done as much in the campaign as I normally would have done, and George had handled that campaign well; we had won it. He had gone to Chicago as the chairman of the delegation, and, while I had many problems with him there, I did feel that he deserved the state chairmanship. I didn't know him well, remember; until then, I had only a few problems with him, and sometimes these happened because of the pressures and the crises and the exhaustion of the convention. I tried to put it down to that and to feel that as he knew me better, and I knew him better...certainly, my desire was to work with him cooperatively.

Several people from Southern California--one of the top political leaders, it says here in the San Francisco News article--said that at least three-quarters of the Southern California Kefauver delegates would support any Northern California candidate for state chairman who wanted to oppose George Miller. If this is true, and no names are quoted, you can see that George had quite a problem.

We did get together several times in meetings, with Pat Brown, with some of the legislators; and all of us who were

Shirpser: Kefauver people pledged sincerely--and we proved it--that we would work for Stevenson, that we wanted to unite the party, that the bitterness that had been engendered should stop, that we had a job to do, and we wanted unity in the party. This was stressed over and over again. In fact, I made a speech to the state convention--and my theme was that we had to forget the bitterness engendered during the primary election campaign, and to work for unity in the California Democratic party. I spoke with admiration for our great candidate for president, Adlai Stevenson, and pledged my fullest cooperation to him. I reminded them of Senator Estes Kefauver's pledge, after Adlai's nomination, to support Adlai, and to campaign for him, and that each of us must do his utmost to insure Adlai's election. There was a good reaction to my speech, as evidenced by calls and letters.

George Collins, assemblyman from San Francisco, was chairman of the Platform Committee at the state convention, and an excellent platform was adopted.

Pat Brown supported George Miller for state chairman toward the end of the convention, and George was elected. He pledged to do his utmost to wage a good campaign to elect Adlai in the general election, in November.

As previously arranged, if George won the election to be state chairman, he and I shared offices.

In this part of these interviews, I find great difficulty--I've really searched my soul as to whether I should speak of the problems and the rough treatment I suffered during this association with George Miller and Bert Coffey, his devoted assistant.

Organizing the Office of the National Committeewoman

Shirpser: Shortly after we came home from the state convention, in the shared offices, I started to organize for the 1952 campaign. As an example of how much--the word is importance, I guess--can go with being national committeewoman, one of the first things that happened after my return was that I received a telegram from Oscar Chapman, who was secretary of the interior in the Truman cabinet. He wired that he wanted me to meet with him at his suite at the Fairmont Hotel at a certain time and

Shirpser: date. I immediately called Jack Tolan, who was my first person to whom to turn when I needed any political advice. I said, "This is my first meeting with a cabinet minister. How do I address him? Do I say, 'Mr. Secretary'? What do I say?" So Jack said, "You say 'Hello, Oscar.'" [Laughter] So I said, "Obviously I'm not going to go up to a strange person who holds a very important political office and just say, Hello, Oscar; that would be terribly presumptuous on my part." Jack said, "You'll see."

So, I got to the Fairmont Hotel and rang Mr. Chapman's suite. His secretary answered and said, "Come right up, Mrs. Shirpser, the secretary is waiting to visit with you." I knocked on their door, the door opened, and there stood a man in shirt-sleeves, no coat, with his tie twisted to one side, and he put out his hand and gave me a warm smile and said, "I'm Oscar; hello, Clara." So I didn't have any worries about how to address him. [Laughter]

We sat down to talk in the living room of his suite and the phone rang almost immediately, and it was a call from the White House, as I could gather from his end of the conversation. So I got up and started to leave the room. Oscar put his hand over the mouthpiece and said, "Clara, I haven't any secrets from you; sit down. You can listen to anything I'm saying." This impressed me very much, that I was considered, as national committeewoman, to be on the level where there were no secrets from me, from one of the most important men in the Truman administration. I had been opposed to President Truman because of his treatment of Kefauver, but this made me think that this office I held can really be an opportunity for accomplishment. I obviously was extremely pleased that I could meet Oscar Chapman on this informal and friendly basis.

We discussed what the basic issues were in California, and Oscar asked me question after question that really made me feel that he respected my intelligence and thought that I had something to contribute. This was a very encouraging thing for me. We had an excellent relationship after that. I was so appreciative of his attitude toward me, a new person in office, without a long background in politics, or much experience. He helped me develop much of what I did learn to do. I often turned to him--wrote or phoned him in Washington, D.C.--when I needed advice on strategy, because this was his strong point. He was able to look over the whole picture, and be objective, and go to the heart of the matter, which is a

Shirpser: rare quality, and it helped me many times.

Then, you come from this kind of a fine relationship-- where you're received at the top level, where you're considered someone whom top people want to work with, and who feel you can contribute something of value, and then you come to sharing an office with someone like George Miller and his ally and confidant, Bert Coffey.

Getting Along with George Miller

Shirpser: I have tried to evaluate George in my own thinking. He had many qualities--he was strong; he was liberal, aggressive, and intelligent. I think one of the problems was that he thought of women in politics as a necessary evil, that had to be endured. He couldn't readily accept suggestions; if he didn't think of it first, it wasn't worth doing. I must have been a trial to him many times, because I'd keep coming up with new ideas, at which he usually scoffed. But, on the other hand, I did some creative things for which he got credit. I often didn't take the credit when it had been I who initiated the meeting or the policy, and had done the hard work of organizing. In my own thinking, I coined the phrase for him: "A one-man team," and really, this was accurate. He couldn't delegate responsibility; he couldn't allow someone to carry out the responsibilities to which they were entitled, without a battle.

I have tried to use as my test in deciding to speak of several events, what this project is about. This has to do with women in politics, and I have said to myself, "Would these things to which I will refer have happened to me if I'd been a man?" And the answer is emphatically "no."

Chall: He didn't treat other people in the same way--and that means men? Now there was a great deal of dissension, and some strong feelings against him in his Kefauver delegation, most of whom were men? Would they have had the same reaction to him and his personality as you?

Shirpser: As I've read to you what Vernon O'Reilly had written in the San Francisco News, I realized anew that many men had that same feeling about George, especially men who were experienced in the party, and had ideas they felt were worthwhile, and

Shirpser: George often wouldn't even listen to them.

One incident comes to my mind: Later when we were on the campaign train with Adlai, George, as state chairman, made the introductions of the people who were on the rear platform of this whistle-stop train trip.

India Edwards was on the train too, I haven't spoken of her yet, but I want to at some length, because she was really one of the most important influences in my political life. She's a great woman. She fights the battle for women tirelessly. She never stops. She taught me what I should do, and asked me to call her if I needed to, if there were problems. I did a couple of times, which angered some of the men party officials. But when I couldn't get women seated at the head table, when I couldn't get time allotted for women who were entitled to speak and to deliver their reports, I sometimes called India in desperation. She became one of my closest and dearest friends, and she still is.

As a sample: I was supposed to ride with Adlai Stevenson to one of our big rallies. Now I hadn't yet had a chance to really know Adlai Stevenson, even when I went to the Denver conference. He was not available for individual consultations. It was truly important for me to know him and to ask him some of the questions to which I needed to know the answers. I came out to the car where it was supposed to be parked, and it had left, and one of the men who was a party official had taken my seat, which I had been invited to occupy. So I told India, and she went with me into Bill Blair's room.

William McCormick Blair was one of the most valuable, fair, dependable, and intelligent men that I have ever known in politics. He was Adlai's law partner and his appointment secretary when Adlai was governor of Illinois. He was a wonderful person to work with in all my political experience. He always traveled with Adlai. When you needed something, you went to Bill; if Bill said, "okay," you could depend on it being done, rather than bother Adlai. You knew where to go regarding Adlai's meetings, press releases, and planning, which was: to Bill Blair.

So Bill apologized to me about missing my ride with Adlai, and he said he would see that I went with Adlai to the Cow Palace rally which was coming up later, and it would be a longer ride. Well I'll tell you what happened later to that ride.

Shirpser: As a sample of my difficulties with George, when we were on that Stevenson campaign train--George introduced all the men on the rear platform at the first stop, and did not introduce India Edwards or me. Now we were right there. There were only a few of us on that platform. He couldn't have missed us. So the minute we came inside, Wilson Wyatt--again, with Wilson, who was the national campaign manager, I had a relationship which I really treasured. He brought out the best in me. He didn't dictate, he didn't order--he asked you; he asked you courteously, and as if you were an intelligent human being. This rarely happened to me with George. So, Wilson called us together, India and I, and George Miller, and he said this: (This is an example of the way in which Wilson conducted himself)--"George, I don't think you realize that you are not making the best use of these two distinguished ladies who are on the campaign train. I know you won't again forget to introduce them from the rear platform." I don't remember what George said. But I'm sure he got red in the face and angry. But this was so typical of the way George conducted himself. It happened to me over and over again with him.

I think when we were discussing this, you and I, you said, "Why wouldn't he have done the same things if you had been a man?" Well, in the first place, I think he wouldn't have thought of a man as he did of me, in this inferior female category. (Men know best!) In the second place, I think I'd have punched him in the nose if I'd been a man in some later problems with him.

I'm going to relate only two incidents, because these were important to me, and they're fairly typical of what I went through: I was invited by the Young Democrats to speak at their luncheon meeting at their annual statewide convention, in Stockton, which was early in August, right after we returned.

I had always worked well with young people. I'm going to refer to this over and over again, because this was one of the best things I did, I think, to encourage young people to actively participate in politics. They really believed in my sincerity, and my desire to do a good job. After all, these were the future leaders of the party, and it was worthwhile for me to spend time with them. I want to read something that a former president of the Young Democrats wrote to me when I retired.

This was to be my first statewide speech, after I returned. I worked hard on my speech--I wanted it to be a good one; I knew

Shirpser: that the press would be there and radio (I don't know whether we had television coverage in those days). I handed my speech to the secretary in our office half of whose salary I was paying (and if I got one-tenth of her time I was lucky). My speech lay on her desk for days and days waiting to have her type it. Finally, I said to her, "I must have my typed speech ready tonight. The Young Democrats' convention is only two days away; I've got to go over that speech. I don't want to read it; I want to have it firmly in mind. I want to underline the first sentence of each paragraph, and then I won't have to read the rest of the paragraph. I must have it tonight; even if you have to stay overtime." She did give me the typed speech that evening, and I did spend time to become familiar with what I wanted to say and to make some interlineations.

When the luncheon meeting came up in Stockton, George walked over to me. Both of us were seated at the head table, on a raised platform. Of course, he was on the program, too, to make a speech. On the printed program I was listed first, after lunch. George said, "Would you mind if I take the first spot, because I have to leave early, and then you speak at the later time when I was supposed to speak." I said, "Of course. It doesn't make a bit of difference." When it came to his time to speak, I could hardly believe what I heard. George was reading the exact words I knew I had written for my speech. I picked up my copy of my speech and I listened. Word for word, he was reading my speech!

Chall: What a thing to face!

Shirpser: Think what a quandary I was in--I was in a panic! I was so furious I couldn't even think clearly; I kept thinking, "Should I get up and denounce him? Will I tell them what he has done? I have my own speech in front of me, and he's reading it word for word. What am I going to do? How could he do this to me?"

After George had gotten about half-way through the speech--he hated to read speeches, he branched off into extemporaneous speaking, and fortunately, he left out the best part of my speech.

When he got through, I expected he was going to leave as he had previously told me that he needed to do. But he didn't; he sat down. He sat through my speech. He evidently was worried about what I might do or say, and I realized this. I was able to expand extemporaneously quite a bit of what I had

Shirpser: intended to say, and I said the things the Young Democrats wanted to hear, which I really meant, too: That we always ought to have young people serving in our policy-making committees, that we shouldn't give them only the monotonous, dull tasks that were always handed out to them--addressing mailing pieces, manning the telephones, poll-watching--important as those were. If they had the talent for writing speeches, they should be given that opportunity. If they were good at press releases, we should help them develop this. Whatever they had ability to do, we should use; not just relegate everyone to the mundane tasks. Then I said that I thought that the voting age should be lowered to enable more young people to vote.

Chall: Oh, you were ahead of your time.

Shirpser: This brought the house down. I got a standing ovation, and George was absolutely furious, because he'd had all the material in front of him when he "pirated" my speech, but he neglected to read that last part of it.

Chall: Maybe he didn't agree with it, and that's why he didn't read it.

Shirpser: He may not have, but he could have said some of the tactful things that I did, such as bringing the young people into the party committees, and getting the benefit of their thinking, so we didn't always keep the status quo--that we brought in innovative ideas.

As soon as the meeting was over, I rushed up to George and I said, "What the hell did you think you were doing? How could you do this to me, ruthlessly taking over my speech!" He said something to the effect that, "I didn't have time to write one, and it was a good speech, so I used it."

Chall: Oh, my, wasn't that infuriating!

Shirpser: He wasn't even sorry. He was satisfied to leave me in this terrible spot, with no mercy, no sense of responsibility to me. This got us off to a very bad relationship. It was awfully hard to forgive. If he had come to me earlier and said, "I haven't time to write my speech. Can I use parts of yours?"--or something, along that line, I would have cooperated--I had a lot more time than he did. But this ruthlessness was just unbearable.

Shirpser: I haven't mentioned that George Miller died a couple of years ago. It's very difficult for me to say these things about him now. I can prove what I'm saying about the Young Democrats' convention; plenty of them would testify to this-- I have the program of the meeting, showing that I was to speak first. I have press reports of my speech. So, I'm not saying anything that isn't factual.

The second incident came up this way: Phil Lasky, who was the president of the KPIX television station, is a good friend, and he always encouraged me in my political efforts. In fact, before I went to the National Democratic Convention, William Winter interviewed me (he was the well-known commentator on KPIX), and he was very pleased with the way the interview went. Incidentally, on TV, I used to be absolutely terrified. I used to wonder what kind of hat to wear, and what dress to wear, and what I looked like, what the camera angles were doing to me.

Chall: [Laughs] I'm sure.

Shirpser: Until they started asking me questions, and then, I got so involved in what I was saying that I really forgot about myself. I always was aware, too, of my responsibility to represent the Democratic party as well as I could. It always was a harrowing experience, but you get a little more used to it. Although I must say that Adlai Stevenson never did--he was always tense, he was always so anxious to do his very best; he was such a perfectionist, that, while he gave these great statesmanlike speeches on television, it was an ordeal to him every time. He'd walk up and down beforehand and not speak to anyone. Of course, I wasn't making any statesmanlike speeches. I was being interviewed, and I had to do it extemporaneously. But, you get to think "on your feet" better, and each time, I think it was a little easier.

Chall: Did you ever see yourself on television?

Shirpser: Never.

Chall: Never! There never was a rerun, and they weren't taped ahead so that you could see them?

Shirpser: No, not in those days, they were live programs. I suspect it's just as well. [Laughter] I often thought I wish I could have seen and heard myself on TV, and other times I was glad I didn't,

Shirpser: because I'd probably have never gone on another program if I had seen and heard myself! My voice has a tendency to go up, as Eleanor Roosevelt's did in her early years, and I never had the time or the money to take the training necessary to do better. But, seemingly what I said was the important thing to me, and I got through the ordeal of TV. It was a challenge, too, and exciting as well as good publicity for the Democratic party, or so I hoped.

Phil Lasky asked me to be on a program where I would represent the Democratic party, and he would have a Republican congressman representing some issue. I said I'd be delighted if it were a field in which I felt capable of doing a good job. He called me a few days later, and he said the program was going to be the Taft-Hartley Act--

Chall: Oh my.

Shirpser: And that Congressman Hartley was coming out to San Francisco for the program. I immediately said to Phil, "Look, this is not my field. I could study; I could prepare myself. I'm sure I could write an adequate opening statement, but I fear that when questions would come to me, I would not be able to answer effectively or adequately. The best person that I know to do this would be George Miller (who was a state senator as well as state chairman of the Democratic party). This is his field. He had always been an advocate and supporter of labor issues, and I'm sure he's opposed to the Taft-Harley Act, and you couldn't get a better man than George Miller."

So Phil said, "You know, you're quite a gal. You're giving up a top TV spot, where you could have had statewide coverage, and you're doing it because you think somebody else can do it better. Clara, I'm certainly going to call you the minute another program comes which you do feel you can handle, and I know you'll do it well."

Phil called George, and George said he'd be delighted to do it and he did a lot of work preparing himself, although he was already experienced in this field. George was appreciative of me, too, that time. At the last minute Congressman Hartley had to cancel the program. I felt awfully sorry, because George would have done a fine job, and it was an important issue, and it should have been fully and well-covered.

Perhaps two or three weeks went by, and one day I got a call from Phil Lasky, and he said, "Clara, I was sorry that

Shirpsers: you wouldn't come on the program a couple of days ago." And I said, "What program?" He said, "I called your office twice and left a message for you to call me, but you did not return my call. This was on election reforms, on which I know that you had done a lot of work, and I wanted you." I said, "I didn't get your messages." Phil then said, Bert Coffey had called him, and had said that I could not go on the program-- I had a conflicting date, and I was going to be out of town, and that George Miller would be glad to do it. Neither Bert nor George told me that I was invited to go on that program!

Chall: So, George Miller did go on the program?

Shirpsers: Oh sure, he went on. But nobody even told me I was the person whom Phil invited.

Later Phil Lasky did ask me for another TV program, and I was glad to participate. But this was the type of treatment I kept getting there--with no cooperation, no realization that I had a top office with responsibilities, and even when I'd made such a generous gesture in his direction, offering him the program I had been asked to take. Even then, they ruthlessly double-crossed me. I have a highly developed sense of fair play, and this outraged me.

Chall: Did you speak to him about it?

Shirpsers: Of course I did--of course! Each time we had an argument, it made the tension worse, obviously; it made it harder to get along. Sometimes I'd come home, and I'd cry because I hadn't done anything to deserve this kind of treatment! It wasn't fair! I was trying to do my job which I was elected to do.

Another thing occurs to me in this context: Jack Tolan called me one day, and he said, "You know, I had lunch today with some of the old-guard members." Jack was close to many of them, but he was wonderful to me, through the years, and so was George Killion, who had been national treasurer of the Democratic National Committee. I hadn't known George Killion until I became national committeewoman, but we did have mutual friends, and he was just great about introducing me to people, and putting in a good word for me. This really counted, too.

The first time I went to Washington, D.C. he gave a large and beautiful party for me. That got me off to a really good start there. If George Killion was sponsoring me in this way,

Shirpsen: you see, it showed that I was not way out, that I was his friend, that I was not a difficult person to get along with. It was only in the office I shared with George Miller that I had a terrible time. Some of the older people in the party saw me as an upstart who had come in with Kefauver, and it took a long time to get that feeling ended. Maybe it never did end. [Laughter]

We were talking about Jack Tolan and this lunch. Jack told me that during lunch, one of the men turned to him--they were all either former or present party officials or office holders of some sort--and he said, "Jack, you're a good friend of Clara's--what does Clara want? Tell us what she wants, and we'll move heaven and earth to give it to her. Then, maybe, she'll keep quiet, and we won't have all this trouble with her."

Chall: Oh, were they having trouble with you?

Shirpsen: Well, they were having trouble with me in that I was trying to accomplish things and brought in new ideas. I was doing something. I refused to be a figurehead. I wasn't doing only what "ideal" national committeewomen do, in their opinion. That is, to sit at head tables and to dress well and be well-groomed and be feminine and charming, occasionally read a resolution that somebody hands them, or introduce a minor official, and contribute lots of money, and raise lots of money--this is the ideal national committeewoman as they saw her. To someone who cares about the issues, who cares about organizing and building the party, you're in their way; you're a threat. So they said, "What does Clara want?"

Jack said, "Yes, I do know Clara well. And I'm telling you this: she has a great sense of responsibility of the importance of her office and of the opportunity for accomplishment. You won't keep her quiet. If she sees something that needs to be done, she's going to go out and try to do it. If you accept that, you realize that this is the way she's functioning and that she doesn't want anything for herself." I really didn't; there was no other office I wanted. I couldn't have gone to Washington, where the rewards are, because my husband had his business here; I had other family ties, too. I had absolutely no desire for a higher office; I wasn't seeking anything. I just was trying to do the job I was elected to do, and I think that Jack did convince them that this was true. I think no one ever convinced George Miller of that--I don't know what he thought I wanted, but I was simply a thorn in his side.

Shirpsen: We came to the parting of the ways. I don't feel I can go into full detail about this, because I no longer can find the proofs I should have if I state details. I'm only going to say it had to do with finances and the way they were handled by George and Bert, regarding large expenses of the State Central Committee which they charged to me without my knowledge or approval.

It was an intolerable situation, and George and I had a bad argument. The next morning, I came into the office, and it had been stripped of every piece of furniture--even my own typewriter, my own desk chair, which my husband had given me (a more comfortable one than had been there), even the contents of my files--everything was gone. I didn't know what to do!

I called Rex Nicholson and told him what had happened.

Chall: Now, what position did he have?

Shirpsen: Rex Nicholson is a very close friend.* I haven't yet spoken of the Denver conference, to which we went together. Rex was California state campaign chairman for Adlai Stevenson. We worked together in the closest harmony and friendship over many years. The friendship between him and his wife Mary and Ad and me was very close. I am still close to them.

Rex told me that George had come to his office and had said that it was impossible to get along with me. George told Rex that there was a debt, which was not my debt, and that the campaign committees would have to absorb that. Then Rex said that they had made space for George in their offices, and he moved into the campaign headquarters.

Chall: I see, so the entire office, the whole suite--his office as well as your had been stripped.

Shirpsen: Yes. Then I said to Rex, "But everything is gone; even things that belong to me. Ellie Heller turned over everything to me. How am I going to account for this to Ellie?" Rex said that George had called her, too, and she okayed his taking all the office furniture she had turned over to me.

This was something I couldn't believe--that Ellie would do this to me, without even calling me to find out my side of this argument. I phoned her immediately, and I said, "You know this is one of the most harmful things, in terms of hurting me, of anything that has ever happened to me. How could you do

*Rex Nicholson died in December, 1974.

Shirpser: this without talking to me?" She repeated some of the things that George had said, so then I told her the whole story, and when I finished, I said, "What would you have done in my place--continue to have large expenses charged to you without your consent?" She said, "I'm sorry that I did okay this before talking to you." I said, "Well, will you at least get back the things that are mine--my desk, my chair, my files, my typewriter?" She said, "Of course." She did--they were delivered the next day.

Here I was left with the rent for three offices to pay; no secretary, a telephone bill, printing, postage, etc. I called a group of friends together and explained what had happened. One of the labor officials kindly came to the rescue--they were working on one of the issues that was very important to them as well as to me in the 1952 campaign. It was the abolition of cross-filing. They took George Miller's office and paid the rent on that. In fact, they shared half the cost of the central office, too. My friends each put up \$100--I think there were about eighteen or twenty of them, so that I could retain my office and continue my responsibilities as Democratic National Committeewoman, especially during the campaign.

I agreed to pay all of my own travel expenses, which I always had done, and the secretary's salary, and to get along with volunteers as much as I could. I wanted to keep those offices, because it was terribly important to have enough space in which to have committee meetings, and to have a central place from which to work and organize--to plan meetings, to fill invitations from groups all over Northern California for Democratic groups who wanted speakers, etc.

Chall: Did you say anything to George Miller after this? Did you discuss this with him or try to, about what he had done to your office, or did you decide to let that go?

Shirpser: What was passed was passed. We had to work together in the campaign. Friends all advised me to develop as harmonious a relationship as possible though it never again was cordial. I think we managed it fairly well. I still felt resentment, but we had a job to do, and I tried to put that above my personal feelings. I think we basically shared our belief in the importance of many issues. As time went on, we developed a better working relationship.

Shirpser: Once he did something that absolutely floored me, because it was so nice! It was in 1954 when I took on the chairman of the Democratic National Committee regarding an important California matter, which I'll come to later. George and I were at a luncheon meeting, seated at the head table. While George was making a speech, he turned to me and said, "You know, it's easy for me to blast Steve Mitchell"--chairman of the National Committee--"but I want to salute a courageous and valiant woman, Clara Shirpser. When she is Democratic National Committeewoman and she takes on the chairman of her Democratic National Committee, there are many reprisals; he can make her life miserable. You have got to realize her courage."

I guess my mouth must have dropped open, because I wasn't used to this praise from George. You see he was capable of doing awfully nice things, too. I previously had never had such a personality clash with anybody in my life, and I wish it hadn't been so with George. Maybe if I'd been more experienced, maybe if I'd understood him better, we could have avoided many problems. But, it was an impossible situation, and it was well for the Democratic party and for both of us that we had separate offices from then on.

Sometimes, I used to think in despair, that he and Bert Coffey both thought that the end justified the means, and whatever objective they were working for, they'd do anything to get there, and I was often the victim.

Chall: But did you ever hear of other people who were victims of his-- what you've called his ruthless manner during the campaign and other times?

Shirpser: There was lots of dissension about George while he was state chairman from many people and many areas.

Chall: I see, but some of the things that he did to you, like taking your speech and refusing to introduce you--those are the kinds of things which he wouldn't have done had you not been a woman?

Shirpser: I believe that's true, and I believe he wouldn't have pre-empted that television program without consultation with me as well as the financial problem he caused me. I just can't believe he would have dared to do this to a man.

Shirpser: I started to speak of a meeting that India Edwards entered. Now, remember her office. She was vice-chairman of the Democratic National Committee, the highest party post a woman had ever attained as well as national chairman of the Democratic Women's Division.* Recently she told me this--that President Harry Truman had offered her the chairmanship of the Democratic National Committee, and she was terribly tempted to take it. I think that she would have been a wonderful national committee chairman. But she thought it over and discussed it, and she came to the conclusion that the men in the Democratic party were not ready to accept a woman in that post, so she did not take it. This is the kind of woman India is--putting what she considered to be the best interests of the Democratic party ahead of her own.

In the 1952 convention in Chicago, India was nominated as vice-president, as a gesture to honor her. She immediately withdrew. But the nominating speech and the seconding speeches were really a wonderful tribute to a great woman.

She was in Northern California to help us in the 1952 campaign. I went to the airport to meet her; I brought her to the Fairmont Hotel; we walked into the large meeting room, and there was the head table completely filled with men only. No seats were kept for India or for me. We stood at the door, and I could see that India was furious. As soon as the speaker stopped, she grabbed my arm and pulled me up to the head table, and she said in a loud voice, "Gentlemen, leaders of the Democratic party in California, perhaps you don't realize that your national committeewoman, Clara Shirpser, holds the highest Democratic party office in this room, as she is the only woman from all of California to represent this state in Washington, D.C. And you don't realize that I am vice-chairman of the Democratic National Committee, and head of the Women's Division, which is one of the highest political offices in the United States. Where is Clara's seat and where is my seat?"

Chall: Well, she was a woman with a great deal of courage!

Shirpser: Oh, she fought. Well, the men all jumped up and scurried around. A couple of chairs were found, and we sat down, and we were asked

*This interview was taped before Jean Westwood was appointed chairman of the Democratic National Committee by George McGovern.

Shirpser: to speak. But this was the kind of thing you ran into at the local, county and often at the state level, too. It didn't happen in Washington, D.C., and it didn't happen when the distinguished visitors from Washington, senators, congressman and governors were here. I never have been treated with so much approbation and so much friendship. Most of those people I got to know are still my friends, and this has been one of the great things in my life. But, somehow in California, there was a lot of being pushed around and slighted.

It's awfully hard not to develop a martyr complex. You can spend your whole time feeling you're being persecuted. I never wanted to do this; I always tried to throw it off and work on a positive basis. It just didn't seem fair, working as hard as I was, and making some accomplishment and I have much evidence of that from many, many letters and clippings to prove this--I just don't know why I had to have all these roadblocks thrown in my path.

Chall: Those roadblocks, at that time, were, you think, set up by George Miller. Would they have happened under any other chairman?

Shirpser: I don't know. He was the only state chairman I worked with, until Roger Kent was elected chairman. Roger was a completely different person. I did share offices with him at his invitation, and while we didn't always see eye to eye, he was courteous; he did recognize my office, both responsibilities and prerogatives. He didn't denigrate it, and none of the former terrible problems arose when Roger Kent was state chairman.

Chall: What about India Edwards--she had been on the National Committee for many years? She was not a newcomer or an upstart in politics or any of these things, so that she had a position?

Shirpser: She was one of the most influential women who ever was in Democratic politics. She was nationally known--I have often wondered why she hasn't written a book. She once told me she didn't dare, because if she told so much of what she knew, it wouldn't be published, or might be libelous. She had problems with the male leaders of the National Committee, too--and with George Miller, as I have mentioned previously.

Meeting Adlai Stevenson

Shirpser: Let me tell you about the Denver conference, because that took place early in the campaign.

It was a Western States Conference--the eleven western states--and it was held in Denver, Colorado, as a central place. Adlai Stevenson was coming to it shortly after the Democratic convention with Wilson Wyatt and Steve Mitchell. All the National Committee members and all the state campaign chairmen were invited.

Chall: Of the eleven western states?

Shirpser: Yes. I went with Rex--and to show you how modern politics can be: Mary Nicholson, Rex's wife, and Ad, my husband, saw Rex and me off on the plane; and then Ad took Mary to dinner while Rex and I went off together to Denver.

It was a wonderful conference. This was my first meeting, with Adlai, although I only had a chance to say a few words to him. There I met Mike Monroney, U.S. senator from Oklahoma, who became chairman of the Speakers' Bureau for the Democratic National Committee. I had a close contact with him for many years. He was a delightful, attractive and able person with a fine sense of humor. I always saw him when I went to Washington after that. We had lunch several times, and he'd keep me abreast of what was happening. One of my responsibilities as national committeewoman was to invite speakers to California through the national Speakers' Bureau, which Mike headed. I would submit a schedule for their trips, covering several areas when possible--make their hotel reservations, transportation, etc. I enjoyed working with Mike.

He made a hit at the Denver conference, which was terribly long. We had so much to cover, and you get restless. When it was Mike's turn to speak, he said, "I have fifteen minutes, and I'm giving you three of them, because I learned long ago in politics--the mind can't absorb more than your seat can take. So stand up and stretch for three minutes." [Laughs] This was the sort of person he was--good sense of humor, affable, very capable, and an excellent speaker.

That night was the big rally for Adlai Stevenson in the big auditorium in Denver. I was supposed to go with Rex, and I was sitting in the lobby waiting for him. Later, he explained

Shirpsen: why he was late. Senator Mike Monroney walked by, and he introduced me to the governor of Oklahoma, and he said, "We have a car and driver out there--can't we take you to the auditorium?" I said, "Well, I'm waiting for Rex." He said, "The heck with him. He isn't here yet, so come on with us." I was delighted to do it. Rex was rather angry at me, but I couldn't miss the escort I was offered and Rex was very late. This meant that we sat in the front row at the auditorium. Naturally, you would when you're with top officials, a United States senator and the governor of Oklahoma. (Evidently some governors were there too; I'd forgotten that.)

Adlai came on the platform, got a standing ovation, and he sat down, crossed his legs and people began to laugh. That's the first time we saw the hole in the sole of his shoe. He had his feet crossed so that you couldn't help but see it. Of course, in the first row we saw it plainly. Mike said, "Good lord, look at his shoe!" In the audience, as one after another saw it the laughter grew. Adlai looked so bewildered and hurt. We were all pointing at his foot. This was all on television. Finally, Adlai looked at his foot, turned his shoe over, and he saw that hole, and he started to laugh, too. After that we always wore pins, the shoe replica with a hole in the sole--you've seen those, haven't you?

Chall: I don't recall.

Shirpsen: I'll show you one.

Chall: I remember the story and I remember the picture of it.

Shirpsen: We always wore them. Because that was the symbol of Adlai--he was working so hard, he didn't even have time to buy a new pair of shoes. He probably would have had those shoes resoled--he was a very thrifty person.

We came away (as I wrote to Adlai later) from that conference with a determination to do our utmost to elect him. The more you saw of Adlai, the more you heard him, the more dedicated you were to him. For me, it was a great experience to know him so well as I did later, and to share his confidence, and have him discuss problems with me. It really gave me such a feeling of identification with him and affection for him. He was warm and friendly, and he had this marvelous wit that came so extemporaneously. It was always a rather subtle sort of wit--never slapstick. It usually developed out of a given

Shirpser: situation, and it was so quick and so appropriate. There has been a book written called The Wit and Wisdom of Adlai Stevenson that deals with some of these things he said, and I have all kinds of quotes from speeches that he made, which I wrote down. Well, we'll talk about the campaign later.

Chall: Now this convention in Denver, I guess, was to make sure that the western Democrats got to know him and to, in a sense, get their strategy together for the campaign. It was a strategy convention?

Shirpser: Yes.

Steve Mitchell, Chairman of the Democratic National Committee

Chall: Had Mitchell [Stephen A.] already been appointed national chairman at that point?

Shirpser: Yes. He was Adlai's choice. I guess after George, Steve was the hardest man to get along with whom I ever knew. He had a very cold, withdrawn sort of personality. He was extremely critical. He didn't bring out the best in you. Now, Wilson Wyatt was the opposite and he and Steve had many problems, because they were two such completely opposite people. Wilson was always tactful; he was always amiable; he always left the impression he liked you, and that he felt you had something worthwhile to contribute. So, you did your best for him. You couldn't do less than your best.

Steve Mitchell antagonized you so much that you did what you did because of Adlai, not because of Steve. He had an unfortunate personality. As a sample of it: Once, when we met him at the airport as we always did--you know, that was my responsibility and also my privilege to go to the airport to meet all of our important visitors, usually with other officials of the party. When the national chairman came into San Francisco, Ad and I usually went alone to meet him. On one of his early visits I remember that I sat in the back seat with Steve, and his wife sat in the front seat with Ad. From the minute he got in the car, I heard nothing but criticism and complaints about California--we hadn't raised enough money, we hadn't done enough organizing, etc. He blamed everyone; and me, too.

Shirpser: Ad, I could see, was getting annoyed and he turned around and glared at Steve a couple of times. Finally, Mrs. Mitchell turned to Ad and said, "You know, I feel so sorry for you." Ad said, "Why do you feel sorry for me?" She said, "It must be so terrible to have your wife in politics, working so hard, and doing all the things your wife does." So Ad said, "I'm very proud of what my wife is doing. I'm encouraging her. I'm helping her." Then he turned around and said, "Mr. Mitchell, I don't like the way you're speaking to my wife. She doesn't deserve it, and I resent it."

This was the kind of thing you got from Steve Mitchell. Imagine what sort of relationship he had with his wife, that his wife had to tell Ad she was sorry for him because I was in politics! I think that he took a dim view of women in politics, too.

Chall: She must have felt sorry for herself, perhaps.

I guess we can talk now about how he got into that post. Why would he have been picked by Adlai Stevenson? What was his background?

Shirpser: He came from Illinois, and he'd supported Adlai. When Adlai was governor, he held a post on the governor's staff, I think. It was Adlai's right to choose him as the man he thought he could best work with as national chairman. Adlai made a great choice in Wilson Wyatt as national campaign chairman. He was wonderful in his role. Perhaps it was good that one was so different from the other, though I doubt it.

Chall: Did he have this abrasive quality in working with everyone?

Shirpser: With many of us in the National Committee, we found him very difficult.

Chall: Men and women?

Shirpser: Mostly women. But I know there were men, too. We were supposed to be satisfied with whatever he recommended. When we introduced resolutions, he often resented it. Later, we will discuss some of the problems we ran into, when we come to a separate file on Mitchell.

Chall: I see. He was just a difficult person to get along with generally.

Shirpsr: I think so. I think this is not being unnecessarily critical on my part, because I have so many good things to say about so many other people that I worked with, on the same level. Later in that campaign, when I had been quite successful in raising funds from calls I made, and meetings which I organized which produced funds, I received a letter dated October 28, 1952, from Steve Mitchell, which acknowledged two large checks I had sent, and which stated: "If your efforts alone could determine the result in California, I would have no fears for the state. You are doing a magnificent job." What a contrast this was with his earlier criticism! I had also made a large personal contribution to Adlai. That was what really counted with Steve.

I was with Wilson Wyatt more during the campaign than I was with Mitchell. I worked with many U.S. senators and congressmen who came out here, and a few governors, too. I have so many good letters from them. It's too immodest to quote from them. But, higher praise I've never received.

My background was one in which I'd worked with men a great deal. First of all, I had been the owner of a men's store, where all the employees in the store were men, and I can't remember that there were bad incidents because I was a woman and they were men. I think I learned to get along with them tactfully.

Then, in my campaign for state assembly, I worked with men a great deal because in those days not too many women participated in politics. I formed a good working relationship with the press, who were almost entirely men--and I want to speak of that sometime, because I was very delighted with the camaraderie we developed, and the way they would tease me, and often quote what I had said. It was only with these two men that I had these really bad problems--George Miller and Steve Mitchell. Sometimes the problems were on issues with Mitchell, rather than personality.

Chall: Well, another time I'd like to take up with you the kinds of people who become top members of the party, because it may be a factor of personality--the drive to get there--that has to do with the way they respond to men and women.

Shirpsr: Yes.

President Truman's Whistle-stop Campaign in California

Shirpser: Could we talk about Mr. Truman--because he was one of the first to come to California to campaign for Adlai--?

Chall: I see. Adlai came later, then?

Shirpser: Adlai came at least twice, but I believe that Mr. Truman came once during that 1952 campaign. He stayed quite a while, traveling around the state.

Chall: Okay. Your responsibility, then, was to meet and be a part of the campaign, as it swung through Northern California?

Shirpser: No, no--statewide.

Chall: All of California.

Shirpser: Yes. The first time that I met Mr. Truman was when we went-- "we" being Rex, and George, and other Democratic political leaders, went to meet Mr. Truman in Eureka, and we joined his whistle-stop train all the way down the state.

Chall: All the way to Southern California?

Shirpser: Yes. We stopped at San Francisco en route.

Chall: I see. From Eureka, that was the starting point though.

Shirpser: Yes, and we made many, many stops.

I started out being very reserved with Mr. Truman. I had the Kefauver campaign still very much in mind and the terrible treatment that Estes had received at the national convention. While I was always courteous and considerate, I was still smarting from all that.

One of the first stops we made was to see a big dam-- it might have been the Shasta Dam. Mrs. Truman and Margaret were along, and I was very impressed with that warm, loving relationship among the three of them. It was so apparent all the time, and it was a happy one--it was infectious; it made you feel good. After all, this was the president of the United States, and whenever he referred to his wife, in speaking of her, he always called her "the boss." He said it in the nicest

Shirpser: way. I mean, referring to her influence, rather than the fact that she was bossy. Because she was quiet and effective, and when she said something, it had an effect on Mr. Truman. President and Mrs. Truman and the candidates were in the first car, and I was in the second car with Margaret and the local party officials.

Chall: The candidates for local--?

Shirpser: For political office in that area; for Congress, for state senate, for assembly--whatever they were running for in '52. We were late in arriving. This is one of the bad things about campaigning--you get later and later as the day goes on. Once, when I was evaluating what it is to be national committeewoman, I said to someone: "If anything can possibly go wrong that day, it will--you can depend on it. Though you checked every detail a half a dozen times, still things kept happening, which delayed you."

As we were driving from where we got off the train to where we were going along the roads, first, and then the streets of the town, all were lined with people. It was in the middle of summer; it was hot, and there they stood, three or four deep all the way, having waited a long time. As Harry Truman came by, they would wave and yell, and we would get the backlash of what they were shouting, and mostly it was, "There's our Harry." Then the next shout would be, "Give 'em hell, Harry."

You know, this was appealing-- There's our Harry." I never heard crowds do that for any other president. Can you imagine people in the crowd calling: "There's our Dick!" But he was "their" Harry, and his identification with the people always perplexed me in relationship to what that national convention had been, where what the people wanted couldn't have counted less.

I started losing my hostility as I got to know President Truman better--he was so down to earth, he was so easy to know, he was so--friendly. He spoke to you in this informal way. There was no VIP attitude on his part. He had tremendous respect for the presidency, but for himself, he was quite humble. As we went on through the day, more and more this was apparent.

Then we arrived in San Francisco. Shortly after we arrived, we left for a meeting--a big rally. I was told to meet in his suite in the Fairmont Hotel with the other party officials. The

Shirpser: Secret Service, of course, had cleared me so I could come and go, and I was admitted immediately. We all started together for the elevator, "we"--President Truman, Democratic party officials and secret service men, and I. Neither Mrs. Truman nor Margaret went to that evening meeting. I think I was the only woman in the elevator.

When the elevator door opened on the main floor of the Fairmont Hotel, there was a roped-off aisle going through the lobby, where the president was to walk and on each side there were cameras and press and people and television. So, we all stood back for Mr. Truman to walk out first. President Truman said, "You go first, Mrs. Shirpser." I said, "Oh no, Mr. President, you go first!" So he looked at me, and he said in a stern voice, "I may be president of the United States, but I am still a gentleman. You go first, Mrs. Shirpser."

I had to walk out into this barrage of cameras, with the president of the United States coming behind me, and I got the devil for weeks, from everyone who was there--even the press--"Didn't you know better? Don't you know you're not supposed to walk in front of the president of the United States?" I said, 'What would you do when the president says, especially President Truman, 'You go first, Mrs. Shirpser,' twice? How could I not go first?' But, it was commented on in the press, too.

Chall: Is that so. You mean a woman had never preceded the president before?

Shirpser: I don't know.

Chall: It's hard to believe.

Shirpser: I did drop back immediately. There is a newspaper clipping of us walking through the lobby, right after the elevator scene. You see, I'm walking with Rex Nicholson there. Mr. Truman is in front, but as we got off the elevator, I was the first one out. And I never was allowed to forget it.

But I think this shows the personality of President Truman.

Later in the trip, we had a very amusing incident: this was probably two days later. I stayed at the Fairmont Hotel where our visiting dignitaries were, so I was ready, early in the morning to start out with them. This was important. For me not to be delayed on the bridge in traffic coming from



San Diego, December 19, 1955. Left to right: Senator Estes Kefauver, Elizabeth Snyder, State Chairman of the Democratic State Central Committee, Clara Shirpaer.



Dinner honoring President Harry Truman. Henry Grady was chairman. October 4, 1952.

Shirpser: Berkeley. I always stayed in the hotel over night, and Ad usually stayed with me, too, because his business was in San Francisco.

So early this morning there was a knock on my door, and I answered it--I think I was in the middle of eating breakfast in my room, but I was dressed. (I usually had breakfast sent up, because it was quicker, if I ordered it the night before, and I'd be ready in time.) You had to be packed and have your luggage in the lobby at a given early hour, too, so it meant getting up very early. There stood a Secret Service man, and he said, "President Truman wants to see you in his suite." Immediately I thought, "Oh, I've done something that is wrong. What have I done? The president of the United States is calling me at this hour of the morning. Something must be wrong."

With some fear I walked to President Truman's suite. Mr. Truman was walking up and down, in the central room, looking agitated, and he turned to me. I said, "Good morning, Mr. President. Is something wrong?" He said, "Am I president of the United States, or am I not, Mrs. Shirpser?" I said, "Well, of course you're president of the United States, Mr. Truman." This was my first president, too, the first president of the United States, whom I knew, and I was in awe of him. He said, "Would you go into Margaret's room, and would you tell her that the president of the United States says that she has been late in starting every time, every place we have been so far, and that the president of the United States is going to leave this room in ten minutes, whether she's ready or not." So I said, "Are you sure you want me to tell her this? She'd pay much more attention if you told her that." He said, "Like hell she would." [Laughs]

This was a typical frustrated father, angered at his daughter's being late, who called me in. I, who had never seen Margaret until two days earlier, had to deliver the message. Really, that was delightful, when you think it through--that he could be so informal, and tell me his troubles and ask me to go in there to Margaret. I knocked on the door, and Margaret said, "Who's there?" rather crossly. I entered and I delivered his message. Then we both started to laugh, and she said, "I guess I'd better be ready on time this time." And I said, "I think I would, if I were you or he's going to start without you. If ever I saw a man who was determined, it's your father this morning."

Shirpser: We kept having incidents of this sort with Mr. Truman. We really got to be good friends, before the campaign was over, and we corresponded many times in later years. I came to like him tremendously. I knew his strengths, and I knew some of his weaknesses, and I think he was a great president, who carried out his responsibilities without shirking, and was determined to do the best he could. As president, you always knew where he stood!

I remember another incident which has been brought to mind quite recently. Once, a Democratic friend called my room who was from one of the northern counties, and said he had some small gold nuggets he wanted to deliver to President Truman, whom he admired so much. He asked if I would bring them to President Truman. I said, 'Well, bring them up here, and I'll call the Secret Service, and see if I can; if they'll allow me to do so.' The donor brought them in, and the Secret Service checked them to be sure they were perfectly all right, and then I called the presidential suite and told President Truman's secretary about the gift for him, and he said, 'Well, come right in, Clara.' I did, and Mr. Truman was delighted with the gold nuggets. He was so easy to see and be with, even though he was president of the United States.

Now I'll tell you about someone different: I've been on the board of the California Heritage Council for several years. Shortly after Richard Nixon became president, some of the people in the northern part of the state donated some gold to be made into a golden bear sculpture--a little bear, probably five or six inches across--a good sculptor made it. The California Heritage Council wanted to present it to President Nixon the first year he was in office, because he came from California.

As of our last board meeting four years later, do you know they haven't been able to get together with President Nixon yet? They had written Washington--they wanted to go down to San Clemente when he was in California. He hasn't found the time. I should think he'd be glad to get it! (He would be, now, after Watergate, I'm sure!) It's a delightful thing to have--it's a solid gold bear made of nuggets from the northern part of the state. They have had fifteen or sixteen letters going back and forth, trying to find a time and place where they can give him this Golden Grizzly. He's never been available, and it's almost four years later.

Shirpser: All I had to do was call President Truman's suite, walk in--after the nuggets had been checked, of course--and hand him the gold nuggets. I mean this is the difference between a president who is informal and easy to know, and someone who is isolated from people and perhaps has exaggerated ideas of his own importance. [Laughs]

Chall: Perhaps that kind of attitude is what gave the people the feeling that President Truman was "their Harry." Of course, what you point out is that he was a man who was humble and enjoyed meeting people. On the other hand, he certainly understood his position in terms of the power he could wield. He did that in the case of Kefauver and probably many others we don't know about, so he could be both humble and a power broker.

Shirpser: Yes, surely.

A strange thing happened: As Mr. Truman was driven up to the Fairmont Hotel--I've heard many different versions of this story, but people who were with him told me this is what happened. It was announced he would arrive at a given hour, and as he got there to the entrance to the Fairmont Hotel, all the window shades were pulled down at the exalted and social Pacific Union Club, which faced the Fairmont Hotel's center driveway. It was as if someone said, "One, two, three, go," and all the window shades were pulled down. [Laughter]

Chall: Is that right. Did he see that? [Laughs]

Shirpser: Surely he saw it.

Chall: What did he say?

Shirpser: I don't know because I wasn't in his car. I think that this was an insulting gesture to the president of the United States. There are many different versions of how this happened, but this was the way I was told it happened. I thought it was very petty. In contrast with this, there was a newspaper article that when Adlai arrived later in the campaign they didn't pull down the shades in their Pacific Union Club, but they did peer from behind curtains to see what Adlai looked like. So you see, they had improved a great deal a few weeks later. Anyway, it's kind of an amusing sidelight.

Chall: It is amusing.

Shirpser: I have a newspaper picture. Accompanying President Truman in the car were Rex Nicholson, California campaign manager, and George Miller, California State Central Committee chairman. The picture is a big picture--three columns--of Mr. Truman arriving at the Fairmont Hotel. The caption says, "With him were two men who were not identified." It took a while for them to live that one down! [Laughs] Here's the press--on the front page, a three-column picture of President Truman, with the chairman of the State Central Committee, with the state campaign chairman--and it says, "With two men who are not identified." Well, these are some of the funny things that happened to you. It wasn't really fair that it should have happened that way to Rex and George--I felt sorry about it--but I couldn't help laughing a little too.

Earl Warren Comes Aboard

Chall: Was Earl Warren on that whistle-stop train?

Shirpser: Yes. He was on the Truman train.

Chall: How long?

Shirpser: He joined us and rode with us for two or three stops. He and President Truman were on the friendliest, joking sort of basis. When Mr. Truman introduced him, which he did personally from the rear platform of the train (that's where everybody stands during the train stops), he said, "Earl Warren should be a Democrat, because his ideas are so much closer to the Democratic party than they are to the Republican." Later he said to Governor Earl Warren, when they came inside the private car of the train, "Earl, you really aren't doing yourself a bit of good traveling with me. You ought to leave the train at the next stop." They were joking back and forth.

Earl Warren was not only acting in his capacity as governor when he welcomed Mr. Truman and said wonderful things about him, but he also was being his friend. He was in agreement with many of the things that Harry Truman stood for. This pleased Mr. Truman greatly. He said it was quite exceptional for a Republican governor to be so welcoming and so much in agreement with what he, President Truman, stood for.

Chall: You don't think there was any reason why Earl Warren was doing it that was intentional--to indicate that he was not wholly backing the Eisenhower-Nixon ticket?

Shirpser: It's hard to say. There was a great deal of animosity between Richard Nixon and Earl Warren which would be inevitable, considering who they were and what they stood for. But I don't know--I can't be sure of Governor Warren's motives. I know he was there and he was wonderfully cooperative and friendly, and we were all very happy to have him around.
[Laughs]

VI ADLAI STEVENSON CAMPAIGNS IN CALIFORNIA, 1952
(Interviews 6 and 7, September 12, 1972, January 17, 1973)

Senator John Sparkman

Shirpser: I'd like to go on to Adlai. I've skipped a lot of what I did in the campaign, but we can take that up at a later time.

Chall: The candidate was coming into California, as part of his campaign throughout the country, and he was known only in Illinois. That I would think would be rather a difficulty. He had no organization ready to go for him in the state. Was that a problem?

Shirpser: Well, many people came from Washington to help us plan and to organize. There were press people, there were people who were good at organization. Oscar Chapman was the first one to come and his forte was strategy. He wanted to get the issues out in the open. He told us Stevenson's decisions on which he wanted to dwell, mostly. This he did from state to state, because obviously, some issues are more important in California than they would be in New Jersey. There was a lot of trouble in California about Senator John Sparkman being the vice-presidential candidate--later I campaigned with him and enjoyed knowing him and working with him. It was decided, at the high party levels, that Senator Sparkman should go into the smaller places like Fresno, and Bakersfield and through the Central Valley, rather than in the big cities like San Francisco and Los Angeles, because they were afraid of pickets, and particularly feared the loss of the Negro vote, which was very important in California.

Chall: Do you know why Senator Sparkman was chosen?

Shirpser: In the 1952 Democratic National Convention, Adlai Stevenson, as the nominee of the Democratic party, followed the tradition of choosing his running mate, the nominee for vice-president. Many names were considered. California, which had supported Kefauver loyally right to the end of the roll call, did not try, as far as I can remember, to influence Adlai, whom we really didn't know.

When Senator John Sparkman was announced as Adlai's choice, there was much rebellion and resentment in the California delegation, which caucused for discussion. Many California delegates wanted to reject Senator Sparkman, chiefly because he came from Alabama, one of the worst segregated areas in our nation. Representing Adlai, speakers came to our caucus to tell us of Sparkman's good voting record in most other fields than civil rights. Even there, considering he came from Alabama, they insisted he had many good votes which affected civil rights, such as better schools, better housing, etc., for minorities.

Since this was Adlai's prerogative to make this choice, many of us thought that we should accept his nominee, since this was his first request to us after his nomination. Reluctantly, the California delegation did vote for Senator Sparkman, as a unit (not unanimously). I voted for him.

After I got to know Senator Sparkman and had the opportunity to study his voting record (he supported Social Security, TVA, low cost housing, Point Four program), I felt much better about his being chosen. I campaigned with him in various areas of California on at least two occasions. He was well received, but not enthusiastically. He had an attractive wife, who was very shy, and who was terrified of airplane travel. He usually had his beautiful daughter with him, too. He spoke well, and tried hard to make friends and overcome the opposition to him. There was some heckling, which he answered good-naturedly, and factually. I grew to like him very much, and usually visited with him when I was in Washington, later. The choice of Sparkman proved to be good strategy, because the only nine states which voted for Stevenson-Sparkman were Southern states.

Assistance From the National Committee

Shirpser: Venice Spraggs, who came out here as India's courier, had been a former newspaper woman in Chicago and was prominent in the NAACP and the civil rights movement, and she spoke for Sparkman. This was important. She said that coming from Alabama, he was liberal, and that though he had had to vote against some civil rights bills which he wished he could support, she could understand why he did.

He had been one of the top people in the Platform Committee. We had come out of that convention with a good liberal civil rights platform. She carried a lot of influence in speaking this way, and I came to know her well. In those days it was very embarrassing, because you could not bring Negroes to many of the big hotels, many of the big restaurants. She stayed with me, here at my home.

Chall: Is that so. In the Bay Area this was true?

Shirpser: In the Bay Area. It was true in other parts of our state, too. I'm going to tell you about my trip in the Central Valley with Joe Louis, the Negro prize fighter, and Ed Roybal, an American of Mexican descent, and of the problems we had. When we think of how much more needs to be done--and heavens knows it does--still, we have made progress. Venice Spraggs was a very capable woman and good to work with.

Then Elsie Jensen came out here, too. These were all called "couriers." Each time I'd have meetings organized for them, and many home meetings in various areas. They were willing to spend their time any way I thought would be most valuable. We traveled together. Elsie Jensen was especially good in Alameda County where she'd been a deputy superintendent of schools. I tried to bring them to the places where they would perform most valuably.

Chall: They're set up to do that, I guess, no matter who the candidate is--it's their role.

Shirpser: Yes, of course. The Democratic National Committee is supposed to be in charge of the presidential campaign, in terms of policy and organization. But it is the State Central Committee officers and the National Committee members who are supposed to have the top level posts in the campaign.

Chall: You were just getting organized in California politics too. Would you have to ask for advice on where to place somebody like Miss Spraggs or Elsie Jensen in terms of where they would do the most good?

Shirpser: Well, surely, I would phone to an area where I felt the "couriers" would be valuable and explain who was going to be here on a certain date, and ask whether they would organize a meeting. Then I would bring her there, as arranged.

Chall: And it wasn't necessarily just women--?

Shirpser: Oh no, though often it was--but these couriers were especially good at organization. Venice was valuable, speaking as a Negro for Sparkman. That was helpful. We took her to many places. I think I drove her; I imagine Ad came with us some of the time, if we went some distance away. They were all very capable women, and they helped with womens' organization, speaking of the importance of women's participation, and the role they could and should carry.

We had people of national prominence coming in and out of California constantly, especially before a whistle-stop tour. Then, advance men were here organizing and deciding which places we were going to stop, and they would go ahead of us and formalize plans. Perhaps it would be good to say how it works on a campaign train--

The Rigors of the Whistle-Stop Tour

Chall: Yes, I'd like to hear how these kinds of things are organized.

Shirpser: Yes. The plan was this: Where we started from San Francisco with Adlai, on a whistle-stop tour to Los Angeles, I think we made nine stops in one day.

Chall: This was on a train?

Shirpser: Yes, on the train. "The Governor" as Adlai was usually called had his own private car, for sleeping and for eating meals. He had one or two of his sons with him always. You know, his wife and he were separated--I guess they were divorced at that point. That was one of the reasons India was often with him,

Shirpser: and Mrs. Edison Dick, a charming and gracious woman, who was head of his Women's Division. I was always along in California, and then when we got to Bakersfield, other Southern California party officials usually joined us.

This is the way it works. Whoever the candidates were in the next area would get on with us in San Francisco. The first stop was probably San Jose. Any candidate for assembly, state senate, or Congress would want to have his picture taken at the rear end platform, in San Jose, shaking hands with Adlai Stevenson and arriving on his campaign train with him on this whistle-stop tour, in their area. So, the format as Wilson organized it was this:

Before you'd get to San Jose, Adlai Stevenson would go into the club car, where everyone was sitting. Beforehand, India and I would have talked to them and found out what the important issues were to them, and got their names down, the offices they were running for and so on, and we'd bring it back to Wilson, and he'd give it to Adlai. So when Adlai came in and John Smith was introduced, he'd know he was running for the state senate--this was part of the procedure. Then Adlai would sit down, briefly--five to ten minutes--and discuss with them what was important for him to say in San Jose. He would do this in sufficient time so he could make notes for himself.

When we departed from San Jose, the candidates who would be running for office in the next stop, say it was Merced--they would all get on, and again, India and I, would interview them and get together all the things that were important, and bring them to Adlai, and he would then come and meet them, and speak with them for a few minutes. Then he would speak at the rear platform in Merced, and introduce the candidates, and urge people to vote for them.

Chall: How many times can you do that in one day and keep your sanity?

Shirpser: That day it was nine (sometimes more stops) times. Adlai hated every minute of it, I think. I didn't say so, but it was quite obvious to me as I got to know him. You see, what he loved to do were the high-level, eloquent, statesmanlike speeches. He didn't like the goldfish bowl aspect of the whistle-stop train campaigning--shaking hands at the platform, saying some nice things about somebody you'd never met before, and being pulled and yanked about, with people reaching up to grab his hand, and trying to pull a button off his coat--these things were very distasteful to him.

Shirpser: Here is an example of a two-day schedule:

Left San Francisco - 7:30 a.m.
Arr. In San Jose - 8:30 a.m.

Stops in

Tracy	Fresno
Modesto	Tulare
Merced	Bakersfield
Madera	

Arrive in Los Angeles much (much later than the scheduled)
10:40 p.m.

Breakfast Meeting in Los Angeles at 8:00 a.m.
Finance Meeting
Political Leaders Meeting
Lunch Meeting
Press Conference Meeting all afternoon
Evening Party arranged by Dory Schary and William
Goetz

Adlai called this "a typical, tranquil California
campaign day."

A whistle-stop train trip is one of the most exhausting experiences that's ever been devised. You would think that between stops you could relax, you could sit around, even have a little privacy, but you are busy from the minute you get on that train till you leave it.

We got to Los Angeles in time to leave the train that night. But it was late that night, and we went straight to the hotel. I think we made at least eight or nine stops. One of the amusing things is, at each stop, since it was summer, and we were going through the Central Valley, many gift boxes were put aboard: grapes, melons and all kinds of fruit, and we were tripping and falling over these boxes. They were in the vestibule; they were between the seats. We couldn't refuse them, obviously, and when we got to Los Angeles, people there had arranged to send them to hospitals.

Then there were all these personal gifts. And Adlai would receive them. He received hand-made clay figures and donkeys (Democratic, that is), busts someone had sculptured of him. He received candy, and all sorts of gifts, and Adlai would turn and say sweetly, "Will you take care of this for me, Clara?", or

Shirpser: he made the request of India, and we'd stand there with our arms laden with gifts. He'd say, "Oh, how delicious this looks," when it was a home-baked pie, and "Oh, what beautiful flowers," and we were just cursing inwardly, because we didn't know what to do with any of these things on the crowded train.

Estes always did this to me, too. I remember one instance where we were in Petaluma, the chicken capital of the world. Estes had received one gift after another, which he'd handed to me; then somebody gave him a box of live baby chicks, and he turned around to try to find me, and I said, "No, you don't, Estes!" and I walked off the platform. I'd had it--a box of live baby chicks was more than I could cope with. But this is one of your duties as national committeewoman!

This was the heart of the summer season when all the melons were ripe. Adlai tasted Cranshaw melon for the first time. You know, it was then a new melon. He loved it. I think he had it three times a day! And once he looked around the table and everybody was eating different things, and he said, "I simply cannot understand you. Here you can eat Cranshaw melon and you're taking things like ice cream and pie and cake. This is the most delicious thing I've ever eaten."

Before we left the train I raided one of the boxes of Cranshaw melons and picked out a particularly good one that wasn't too ripe, and when I saw him off at the airport the next day I handed him this melon all tied up with ribbons as a going-away present. [Laughs] I thought of it the other day, and remembered that he was delighted with it. He said that he was going to eat every morsel of it, probably on the plane.

But, you see, people are on the train constantly, and you don't have a minute of privacy. You've got to be available to talk with them, so they won't feel neglected. You have to continue to be gracious and sweet and attentive, when you're so tired you can hardly bear it, and you just want to get away by yourself for two minutes. You have to do this to shield your candidate so he can be sitting there writing his speech and trying to incorporate the issues which you've learned about from the political visitors, which he's going to use at the next station.

This type of thing was particularly difficult for Adlai. Estes could take it in stride and enjoy it, and so could Mr. Truman. Adlai didn't show it. He did his best to always be

Shirpsers: smiling and gracious, but it took an awful lot out of him. It was not the kind of campaigning he enjoyed, and of course, we did give up that kind of campaign later. We campaigned by plane--airplane, you know. But the whistle-stop train tour was the way to campaign in those days, and Adlai couldn't avoid it; but it was his worst experience in California.

A very amusing incident happened: At Modesto, people got on who were the candidates for Fresno, and they were VIPs in that political area, and often were donors of campaign funds. All these people would get on en masse when you came to the stop before the place where they wanted to be photographed with Adlai. Among them was a very colorful man who had been a Kefauver delegate. His name was Setrakian, and for some reason I never discovered, everyone called him "Sox," "Sox" Setrakian.* He'd been very helpful on the Kefauver delegation with funds, and he had a lot of influence among the large group of people of Armenian descent in Fresno. I got to know him through Suren Saroyan who was a close friend, from San Francisco--also a Kefauver delegate.

So Sox got on the train with a big hug and a kiss for me, and announced that he was going to call a nationwide meeting of "Armenian-Americans for Adlai Stevenson," and he wanted an "audience" with Governor Stevenson. Incidentally, he modestly called himself the Raisin King of the United States.

Chall: He is. The Regional Oral History Office is planning an interview with him now.

Shirpsers: Oh, is he? Good. Then he brought a gentleman with him whom I knew, but I can't remember his name, whom he announced as the "Turkey King" of California. So, we had all this "royalty," and they wanted an audience with the "Governor," as we always called Adlai.

So I said, "It can't be done, Sox. This is the one place where Wilson Wyatt his campaign manager, is absolutely adamant. Nobody on this train has had a private interview with Governor Stevenson. It's too difficult, it's too time-consuming, too exhausting." He said, "Well, then I'll have to call off the

*Arpaxat "Sox" Setrakian died July 1, 1974.

Shirpser: meeting." So, I went to find Wilson Wyatt and explained the circumstances, and Wilson said, "I don't dare ask Adlai; you ask him." I said, "Oh no, I don't know him well enough." You know, this was early in the campaign, when I hardly knew Adlai, and I said, "I don't dare ask him. You're the campaign chairman, you've got to ask him." He said, "Do you really think it's important?" I said, "All I can tell you is, he was very generous with Estes, and the fact that he was a Kefauver delegate and is now for Adlai is important in this area. I think he will have that big meeting for Adlai, and it may amount to a good deal." Wilson said, "I'll go ask Adlai."

Well, Wilson came back looking depressed, and he said, "Adlai agreed to two minutes. Clara, I'm depending on you--if you have to get a hook, you yank them out of there in two minutes. Tell them that they are the only people in the state of California who are going to have a private interview with Governor Stevenson and make sure they really are for him and not just saying it."

So, I went to Sox and I said, "Listen. You're getting a real privilege. Nobody else in the whole state is having a private interview with Adlai. I put my own influence on the line saying that I could vouch for you. Now, you know I was heart and soul for Kefauver; now I'm putting every bit of help and energy and strength and devotion I have into the Stevenson campaign. How do you really feel about this, Sox? Now tell me the truth?"

Sox looked me in the eye and said, "Clara, I'm completely taken in by the Governor." Well, this was his own rather different way of speaking, you see. [Laughter] I gulped and choked a little and looked in all directions, because I didn't want to giggle, but it struck me as so funny!--"I'm completely taken in by the Governor," you know, the implications to that.

Well we brought Sox and his friend in, and Adlai greeted them very courteously and cordially. I don't think Adlai got in two words the whole time--they were busy telling him what to say and what the issues were and how to win and so on. At the end of two minutes, I pulled at both of them and I said, "I promised that you would only be here for two minutes." Sox said, "But I've got so much more to say to him." I said, "Well, you'll have to wait for another time, because Governor Stevenson must conserve his strength. So please come." Adlai was very

Shirpser: grateful--it probably was three or four minutes by then, but I did get them out.

That night I was asked to sit next to Adlai at dinner in his private car which I was delighted to do. You see, Governor Stevenson had a private car, and we were invited in--those of us who had state offices--there were six of us at the table. Adlai looked so tired and so depressed, and I thought of the story of Setrakian. And I said, "Would you like a good laugh, Governor?" He said, "I would love a good laugh at this point." I started to tell the story, and then I realized all the derogatory implications that were in that statement of Sox. As I went on, I got more and more nervous about it and thought, "I don't know Adlai that well. He may be resentful; he may think I have an awful nerve to tell a story like that." When I got to the punchline, when he'd said, "Clara, I'm completely taken in by the Governor," Adlai threw his head back and laughed and laughed. Then he said, "Clara, this is the first honest man I've met since I got the nomination." That was so typical of his quick wit and his humble sense of himself. I've never forgotten that story.

Chall: It's interesting that he would have been for Kefauver. I always thought of him as a fairly conservative kind of person--Mr. Setrakian.

Shirpser: Well, you see, Estes appealed to people on the basis of his courage and integrity. People who didn't agree with him on issues still were wholeheartedly devoted to him. He had the strength and the courage to take on all the obstacles this brought to his career and to say what he thought, and this appeals to the American people--courage, and strength, and refusal to compromise on principle. These were Estes' strong qualities--you know, people trusted him. All through the campaigns I watched this, and understood more and more that he had this tremendous rapport with the people.

Chall: I wanted to ask you a few more questions about the train. Approximately how many cars were on these whistle-stops, and who went along on these rides, or this ride, or any rides?

Shirpser: I am not absolutely sure who was with us beyond the top people--Rex Nicholson, who was the state campaign chairman for Adlai, and George Miller, of course, who was the state chairman of the Democratic party. I don't remember who was Northern California chairman at that point, but he certainly was along.

Shirpser: And India Edwards and I--India Edwards was chairman of the Women's Division, vice-chairman of the Democratic National Committee. Probably the county chairmen from San Francisco County and from Alameda County. They kept coming on and off the train at each stop. A few of the big donors who wanted to come were along. The train was full. I would guess we had nine or ten cars--maybe more.

The Press

Chall: I see. Press?

Shirpser: The press had at least one car, maybe two. We had national figures with us--this was one of the interesting parts of this train trip to me. I remember Ed Morrow with us some of the time. We had Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. with us, Eric Sevareid, and we had local press coming on and off. We had Larry Davies from the New York Times. We had national press and commentators with us. And after each speech that Adlai would make from the end of the train, they would all sit down together on the train and evaluate Adlai's speech and the crowd's reaction with Wilson Wyatt. The first time I was on the whistle-stop train when they all gathered together, near where I was sitting, I got up thinking, 'Probably they don't want me in this, because they're going to speak very frankly.' Wilson said, "Sit down, Clara; we want you to hear this. We want your comments, too."

Chall: Who were these people who evaluated--the campaign people and the press?

Shirpser: Oh, the press and the campaign officials, and political officials. The press adored Adlai!

For instance, he would hand out a prepared speech to the reporters. All this time the train was traveling, his secretaries were typing speeches for him. He'd dictate the speech, and they'd put it into typewritten form, and then he'd go over it. If you ever saw one of his speeches, it would look like this--with interlineations in the margins, with comments, with an asterisk, and then at the bottom of the page, what he wanted added to that paragraph. He was working on his speeches almost the whole time.

Shirpser: But the press, because he always spoke extemporaneously, too--he didn't follow the written speeches much of the time--would stand right in front of the rear platform where Adlai was speaking. Then they would talk to people around them to get their reactions. I don't think we ever started to leave town that we didn't have to stop the train and pick up some reporters who were running along the track--they had missed the train. The press hung on every word Adlai said, because they never knew what he was going to say.

They said they never left the train when they traveled with Ike. Ike would hand them a mimeographed sheet and he would read it, and it was the same speech, with only minor changes. It was a trite speech and it was usually dull, and the reporters stayed on the train; they didn't even get off to listen to Ike read his speech. Once in a while they'd go out to get crowd reactions.

These conferences with the press were tremendously helpful. We learned a lot in terms of what they thought had been effective; what we ought to emphasize, what we ought to drop. It was a fine education for me to hear their comments, because these were some of the top press people in the country who were traveling with us. It was a real joy to listen to their analytical minds at work. Wilson particularly valued this.

Now, Steve Mitchell didn't care as much about what the press said. He and Wilson were about as different as two people could be. Fortunately Wilson was the one on the campaign trail with Adlai. He would go in and talk to Adlai about what the press said, and then try to get their ideas into what would be said at the next stop.

On the train, as I told you, India Edwards was usually with us. A press conference after a whistle-stop was breaking up and India had already left us. One of the reporters said to me, "When you're on the back of the train (on the rear platform) India always waves both hands when she's introduced. You only wave one hand, why?" I didn't really know why. So, I said the first thing that came to mind, "Well, India is so much bigger than I am." I meant, "bigger" in terms of her importance. She was quite stout then; she no longer is. They thought that was very funny. And they kept threatening that they were going to tell her, and I would have done anything to stop them. I just said it without thinking, really. I know that India wouldn't have been pleased. She'll

Shirpser: probably hear this for the first time. But you have to be so careful with the press.

And then a funny thing happened at a speech. I believe it was at the Veteran's Auditorium in the general election when Adlai was speaking there. There was a large crowd. I was asked to welcome Adlai, introduce one of the other speakers, a woman.

So, I used this opportunity to urge more women to participate more actively in politics. I said something to the effect that we needed to work at the grass-roots level because this is where we had to build our party. And that surely, when we talk about grass roots we've got to nourish them, and who knows more about providing nourishment than women? Well, immediately one of the press produced the image of a woman nursing a baby, providing nourishment. Women do provide nourishment all their lives by fixing food for their families and this is what I was thinking of. People kept reminding me about that press story. They said, "Well, how are the grass roots flourishing these days? Giving them enough nourishment?" You know, you just can't live down things like that for a long, long time. I learned to be very, very careful of what I said because often without meaning to, I became humorous in what I said.

Chall: Well, the press has a way of turning a phrase and making a little pithy headline out of a catch word.

Shirpser: But, mostly they were awfully good to me and cooperative.

Adlai Stevenson's Humor

Chall: You said earlier that Adlai Stevenson was continually revising his speeches, based on what his advisors and the press corps thought would be better at each stop along the campaign trail. I would have expected that, if you're going down the Central Valley in a campaign of this kind, that a speech can be fairly routine. Why was it necessary to...

Shirpser: Not with Adlai. Because Adlai didn't like routine speeches. He wanted to say something original; he wanted to say something different at each stop. He disliked repeating himself, except

Shirpser: on salient issues, which he naturally had to bring up. He kept saying witty, clever things. I have this paper where I've jotted down quotations from some of the speeches he made...

Oh, and another thing we had to endure were the introductions. All the local chairmen--this was their "day in the sun," with television, and radio, and the press. So they would give these flowery introductions. One of them I remember--early in the morning. Once I guess we did sleep on the train, because I remember this was a very early morning speech at the back of the train. This local chairman said, "Our candidate's full of vim and vinegar." Adlai looked a little stricken, and then he said, rather slowly, "Well, at this hour, your candidate's also full of California orange juice and scrambled eggs," which brought a big hand from the audience.

Another time, I remember someone said of him, "This is our candidate for the next president of the United States, who came out of the nowhere." Adlai said, "I may have come out of the nowhere, my good friend, but I'm certainly going somewhere, and that's to victory, with your help." He always had this quick wit, where he could take something banal from their introductions and turn it into something good. But you can imagine what a strain it was for him.

Chall: I can see that if this is the way he operated, he was under an intense strain.

Shirpser: Then all these people in the audience kept pulling at his hand and his coat, sometimes trying to pull a button off. Crowds are certainly unpredictable.

Once during the campaign--there was this sort of thing which always bothered him, when this woman ran up to his car. Somehow she had gotten through the Secret Service and she thrust her hand in and grabbed Adlai's hand and shook it violently, until she could be dislodged by the secret police. A couple of hours later there was a call to the State Central Committee office from this same woman saying that she had "lost her diamond ring, and did Adlai have it?" Too often we ran into eccentrics like her.

All through the years people have said to me, "Adlai should not use humor as campaign technique. His humor's marvelous, greatest thing I've ever heard, but the crowds don't understand it." I have yet to talk to a human being who didn't find Adlai's humor great, delightful--and yet, all through the campaigns, both times, 1952 and 1956, you kept hearing these

Shirpser: comments--especially, "Adlai's speaking over the heads of the people."

The basis of Adlai's campaign was to talk sense to the American people. He wanted to elevate, he wanted to educate, he wanted to explain to the people what democracy meant and why we needed to strengthen it. It was the basic part of his campaign. He couldn't speak in cliches.

Once, later in 1956, when I was campaigning with Estes, I saw Adlai in one of the Northern towns, like Red Bluff, and some idiot (Democratic official) persuaded him to get on a horse wearing chaps, and a big cowboy hat and a bandana around his neck. If ever I saw a person who was wretched and unhappy, it was Adlai riding down the street in that kind of a regalia. Estes and I were standing on the corner, and Estes was beautifully groomed as always--he was very meticulous about the way he looked. We were standing on a corner with a group around us, waving at Adlai, and Adlai trotted by on his horse. Both Estes and I said, "Why does he let himself be taken out of character in this way. Anybody can get on a horse wearing chaps and a cowboy hat, but Adlai had something so real and vital to give to the people."

His campaign staff pressured him to do these things. I've often thought that's why he lost the '56 campaign, because he let himself be influenced by people who really didn't understand him or realize what his value was.

Chall: He had different campaign managers the second time around?

Shirpser: Yes.

This was after the 1952 campaign--I just jotted down some of the funny things as they happened. Adlai wrote to me and he said, "I keep receiving long letters from people who did not vote for me, and they write to me and they explain why, usually apologetically. It would have been so much easier if they had only marked a cross in the right place last November fourth."

Southern California

Shirpser: Well, to go on with the train. We had a rather unhappy thing happen at Bakersfield. The whole group from Southern California got on. George Miller was state chairman, but the Southern California chairman was Congressman Clinton McKinnon, I believe. There were also John Anson Ford, the Democratic National Committeeman with whom I had a splendid relationship all through his brief term; Elizabeth Snyder, who was, I think, chairman of the Women's Division in Southern California, the county chairman from Los Angeles County, probably Don Rose, and a lot of other Southern California people.

So, Liz called me to one side and she said, "Clara, I'm going to tell you something you won't like, but I'm telling you this as a friend in the hope that you'll avoid something unpleasant. I wish you'd call Rex Nicholson and George Miller together and tell them that I said as a friend that when they get to Los Angeles they should let the Southern California group take over, don't try to manage the campaign in Southern California." So, I said, "But, Liz, this is ridiculous! These are state officials! I was elected to represent all of California. Southern California hasn't seceded! I can't tell these people they can't speak or offer advice when they get to Southern California! That is their responsibility!"

She said, "Well, I was afraid you might react this way, Clara, but I'm telling you if you don't want trouble just let the Southern California people handle it." Naturally, I resented this attitude. I said, "Well, you tell Rex and George yourself." She said, "No, you can repeat what I said. They trust you."

So, I called them together and I told them and they were furious. They said they wouldn't pay any attention to it. I said, "Well, I delivered my message." They were both saying, "What the hell is the matter with the Democratic party in California? We waste all our strength with people fighting and knifing each other in the back instead of working together to elect our candidate." They said, "Don't say a word about this to anybody, especially the press."

I said, "I didn't intend to. I'm just giving you the message. I don't expect you to take a back seat, but maybe defer to them a little, and find out what they've planned and follow their plans. Because Liz wouldn't have told me this, she's

Shirpser: a very good friend and a very fine person, unless she felt it was necessary." We were all under great tension for the rest of the trip. This was too bad, because it was so unnecessary. None of us intended to take over when we got to Southern California. But to tell us that we shouldn't express an opinion, and we couldn't have any part of what was going on beyond a spectator role was a bad tactic. I don't know that anybody ever said this before because it was only the four of us who knew it and I certainly didn't ever speak of it.

Chall: Didn't John Anson Ford know it?

Shirpser: He was in a very difficult position. At the end in the convention when we were all so upset and discouraged about what was happening to Estes, John Anson Ford had an unfortunate press conference. I have a letter here which I wrote to Adlai, July 31, 1952, right after the convention, pledging my support. Evidently what John Anson Ford said, in the press interview, prior to Adlai's nomination in Chicago, was that if Adlai Stevenson got the nomination, Jake Arvey would be the number one man in the White House. John said it in the heat of frustration and resentment of the boss-managed convention of which I've spoken. Estes got such a terribly unfair deal all the way through. But, you can imagine what this did to John's relationship with Adlai, in the beginning of the general campaign. There were Stevenson people who wanted John to resign and who were so incensed they said they'd never work with him.

I have here in my letter to Governor Stevenson, "...the members of the press have been calling me frequently all through the day regarding the situation in the southern part of the state, especially the excitement regarding the statement that John Anson Ford had released..." I said that I hoped to be able to work out with John, and George Miller and Rex Nicholson during the next week at the Democratic State Convention in Sacramento, a better working relation and to try to forget what happened during the convention, which had been said in the heat of exhaustion and frustration and certainly wasn't true.

Then I mentioned to Adlai that I had sent him a telegram on July 28, right after the convention in which I said, "Heartiest congratulations to you and to the Democratic party for choosing you as our great candidate to lead us to victory in November. I pledge you faithfully I will work untiringly with all the loyalty, sincerity, and devotion I possess for your election as president and for Senator John Sparkman as vice-president in

Shirpser: California." So, my statement and attitude toward Adlai was clear after he received the nomination. Once I heard him make his acceptance speech I knew that this was a great man and I have always have marveled and I never shall cease to do so that we got a great man like Adlai the way we got him at that convention.

We got through the rest of that day on the train and then we got to Southern California at night and went to our hotel. Then, we had meetings all during the next day which was really one of the most hectic days I remember. All day long there were meetings scheduled. During the morning committee meetings were held, then a luncheon meeting at which Adlai spoke, afternoon sessions, meeting with finance people, it went on and on. And of course, the big event was the exciting and glamorous movie party for Adlai. Dore Schary and William Goetz had wired all of us prior to the campaign trip that we were to be their honored guests at this party. I'm sure there were more than a thousand people there.

They had erected a huge pale blue silk tent on the lawn of a spacious garden that accommodated all these people. All the Who's Who of moviedom were there. I mean, the intelligent ones! I don't remember Frank Sinatra being there, or John Wayne; but I would think that almost anybody that was anybody in Hollywood was there pledging their allegiance to Adlai and really looking to him with such respect, and admiration, and devotion. It was a magnificent party with an orchestra and perfectly wonderful food, and a reception line of important movie stars.

I got quite a kick out of meeting Edward Robinson, Paul Newman, Humphrey Bogart, and Lauren Bacall, and all these famous people. Everyone was so warm and welcoming. It was really a beautiful party. And on our way back to the hotel, I was riding with Adlai and Bill Blair, and Adlai looked at me and he said, "Well, this was another of those tranquil California days." [Laughs] Really, we could hardly speak we were all so tired. And he was still able to say something which was witty and make us laugh.

Chall: How do candidates stand days like that? They all have them, even today.

Shirpser: It takes a terrible toll. It really does. I don't think anything as strenuous as a campaign train exists today, a whistle-stop tour. But, certainly getting in and out of

Shirpser: airplanes at all hours and flying during the night is terribly exhausting too. But, at least on a plane there is the opportunity to relax for a little bit between stops. On the train there is no opportunity, you're busy every minute.

Rally at the Cow Palace: A Misadventure

Shirpser: I'd like to tell you about a rally we had at the Cow Palace during Adlai's visit. This one was really Rex's pride. He against everyone's advice, rented the Cow Palace for a Democratic rally for Adlai. Everyone said that he couldn't possibly fill it. Rex was a very capable person and he said he would fill it. And he did. I guess, it was the largest Democratic political meeting ever held in California.

In order to all be together as we usually were when Adlai was here or when Estes was here, Ad and I took a room at the Fairmont to stay overnight so we'd be right there for everything that was going on. We had a full day of meetings before the rally, but we were scheduled to leave the hotel at seven o'clock that night. Everyone had an early dinner in their rooms and we were to meet in Adlai Stevenson's suite at 6:45 p.m. I was about four doors away from his suite on the same corridor. We were to go down to the lobby together; they always rope off a passage in the lobby for the candidate and his party to walk through without being stopped and pulled at, and the cars would be waiting in front of the hotel at seven.

Well, a quarter to seven I went into Adlai's suite, the door was wide open and I walked in and nobody was there; the rooms were completely empty. I thought, "Did I make a mistake?" I had written down the time, because you know when you're tired you must keep a schedule for yourself so you don't make mistakes. My time schedule was accurate, but no one was there. Adlai's rooms were empty.

This was the first time I was actually going to ride with Adlai in his car and to have an opportunity to talk to him. There were a dozen things I needed to know in scheduling meetings, and who he would like to have sent out here to campaign for us, who I should contact. You know, he had many close friends here. I can't tell you how many questions I had.

Shirpser: I got down to the lobby and the ropes were all down. So, I knew the party had left because they were picking the ropes up. Then I heard somebody shouting at the entrance. I thought that something must be happening and I went there. And you know who was at the entrance? None other than Adlai Stevenson's sister, Mrs. Ives, who was traveling as his hostess. She was always called "Buffy" although I never called her anything but Mrs. Ives because she's very much a grande dame person and quite dignified. And she lit into me! "How could you let this happen? They've left without me! What am I going to do?" I said, "They left without me, too. They must have changed the time and they didn't let me know, either. Evidently they told all the men because there isn't a man around here who was left, just you and me. You're only Governor Stevenson's sister and his hostess, and I'm the Democratic National Committeewoman of California, and I was supposed to ride with Adlai!" We were, of course, very agitated and a policeman came and said, "What can I do for you?" I said, "Get us a police car, and an escort, and a siren, and get us down to the Cow Palace!" I explained what happened and who Mrs. Ives was and who I was. I said, "We have got to be there when the introductions are made; I'm scheduled to speak and to welcome Governor Stevenson to California."

So, he got a police car and he got a motorcycle escort and within five minutes we were on our way. They raced through red lights. Mrs. Ives and I had our hands over our eyes. We couldn't look. We skidded around corners, we passed cars, we went through red lights, and the siren didn't stop screaming all the way down. I think we must have gotten faster to the Cow Palace than anybody in history! We got there and we started to go in and found that the Cow Palace is under the jurisdiction of the San Mateo Police Department. And they had never heard of us and they wouldn't let us in. We were standing there and I shouted: "This is Adlai Stevenson's sister, Mrs. Ives!" "Never heard of her." "I'm the Democratic National Committeewoman for California!" "Never heard of you." Well, we were absolutely in despair at that point. We just couldn't bear it.

Suddenly I saw an official I knew and I yelled to him and he came and he vouched for us, said who we were and we were allowed to enter the gates. We wore hats in those days and our hats were awry and our hair was straggling and our make-up was gone. We learned from this friend who escorted us to the platform that Lauren Bacall, who was the chairwoman for introductions, had introduced us at least twice by then. I was

Shirpser: supposed to speak. I had so carefully prepared what I had wanted to say. My part of the program was finished. After we were seated, Lauren Bacall finally did introduce us. We were both in a state of collapse. Adlai looked at us so reproachfully, as if to say, "How could you do this to me?"

The only thing that made me able to bear it was what I later heard from one of the press--everybody came up, naturally, to ask what had happened. We told them. They said, "You mean the California campaign staff is so poorly organized that they didn't even go down the corridor four rooms from Governor Stevenson's suite and tell you, and tell Mrs. Ives, who was in the room next to Adlai's, that they were leaving early?" I said, "No, they didn't." I did not protect them on bit. I didn't speak to any one of them for days, because I was so resentful.

But, Rex Nicholson, who was state campaign chairman for Adlai, and George Miller, who was state chairman of the Democratic party, got there early. The San Mateo police wouldn't let them in! No one had told the San Mateo police their names and they didn't have the list. Those two large men--well, Rex is over six feet tall and stocky, and George was fat--they had to climb over the fence in an isolated area to get into their own rally! So, after I heard that I didn't feel quite so badly. [Laughs]

But, it was one of the most hectic, most agonizing experiences in my life to be left in the lurch that way.

Chall: Who made the decision like that? Wilson Wyatt?

Shirpser: Oh, I'm sure Wilson wouldn't have done that. But, evidently somebody on the staff, at the last minute, said that we've got to leave early because of the traffic, and we don't want to take a chance of lateness. We'll start fifteen minutes earlier. Evidently all the men officials were notified. Only Mrs. Ives and I were left.

Chall: All those that were in the hotel, but obviously Miller and Nicholson weren't in the hotel at that time.

Shirpser: They went down earlier. So, everybody else who was to go with Governor Stevenson was notified of the earlier departure. I don't think it was done deliberately, but why is it that women are the ones who are always the ones left holding-the-bag, and not notified? That's what happened to Mrs. Ives and to me.

Shirpsers: We had quite an experience at another time when Adlai was here, driving to Sacramento. We all left the hotel together very early in the morning, I imagine about seven-thirty because we had an eight o'clock rally at the University of California.

In those days--to show you there is an improvement today--no political figure could come on the campus. Adlai Stevenson was not allowed to come on the campus to speak! So, naturally, Berkeley being my home town, I took a leading role in Adlai's Berkeley rally with Laurance Cross, who was mayor of Berkeley at that time. We had a platform erected on the west lawn of the campus. You know that large expanse of lawn. That lawn was jammed with seven or eight thousand people. The crowd overflowed the sidewalks. It overflowed the street. Traffic stopped. All these people came to hear Adlai.

Chall: How could he do that if he wasn't allowed on the campus?

Shirpsers: Well, the west lawn was evidently outside the gates of the University. I guess the lawn belongs to the city of Berkeley. We couldn't enter the sacred gates, but we could have a meeting outside of them. It was a tremendous rally and Adlai made a stirring speech. I spoke, too, welcoming him and telling how much it meant to have him there, and so on. I think Larry Cross introduced him but I gave the welcoming speech.

Caravan to Sacramento: Another Misadventure

Shirpsers: Then we left Berkeley. The way this caravan was set up was: We had about twenty-five cars and each one of them was driven by a volunteer student who was very carefully selected as to his dependability, and good driving, and who was supporting Adlai. Probably each one of them was a Young Democrat from the campus. We made a whole series of stops for meetings to culminate in Sacramento where Adlai was taking a plane to fly to another state.

With us was one carload of movie stars, and they were a tremendous attraction! Lauren Bacall and Humphrey Bogart, Robert Ryan and Mercedes McCambridge. Those four were in a car with a student driver. We made many stops--Berkeley, Richmond, Vallejo, Vacaville, and finally Sacramento. I was in the car with Mrs. Ives. She was a fine woman and extremely

Shirpser: capable; we always asked her to speak and it was important for her to be traveling with her brother, Adlai. But, about halfway to Sacramento she said, "When are we going to stop for a toilet?" I said, "I don't know, but I'll ask at the next stop." Well, I asked the head of the staff when this stop was arranged and he said, "We haven't made any plans to stop for this."

I said, "Look, we left the hotel at around seven in the morning and we're not going to get to Sacramento until noon. When are you going to let people go to the toilet? Obviously you have to." He said, "You tell me where I can find a place for twenty-five cars, with four or five people in each, where we are going to be able to go to the bathroom without delaying this trip for an hour. Her Grace is just going to have to hold it!"

I came back and told Mrs. Ives and she was furious. "You can't treat my brother this way. You are going to wreck his health, and I need to go to the bathroom, and we've got to stop." So, I said, "Mrs. Ives, your campaign staff made these arrangements, I have no control over it. I'm sorry, but if you want to drop out of the caravan, we'll stop at a service station and try to catch up." She said, "No, I won't do that, but I think it's a disgusting arrangement."

I remember Nancy Kefauver had a bladder condition after Estes' first campaign. She had to go for many hours at a time without being able to relieve herself. Possibly she had a weak bladder and the campaign aggravated her condition. That's one of the reasons she didn't campaign very much in '56. No one on the staff seems to realize that human beings have to go to the toilet.

When we got to Sacramento after all these stops the movie stars were no longer with us. I think the last stop where I saw them must have been Vacaville. We got to the platform in Sacramento, where Pat Brown, attorney general, was chairman of the meeting. The meeting was on the big lawn at the capitol building, where a platform had been built with rows of seats and a microphone for Adlai to make his address.

Of course, we were very late by then. You get later each stop. People pull at you and you have to stop and shake hands. No matter how much the Secret Service is guarding the candidate, the crowd will get to him. You can't just rush through. The

Shirpser: candidate has to be courteous and cooperative. We sat down on the seats of the platform in Sacramento. I was in the front row. I spoke, again welcoming Adlai. There were four empty seats next to me. I looked around and I realized the movie stars were not there. Several people called from the audience, "Where's Lauren Bacall? Where's Bogey?"

Well, Adlai was making his speech, and in the middle of one of the most important parts, in marched the movie stars, disrupting his speech. He glared at them, and I was as angry as he was. They sat down in the front row disrupting everything. Bogey was sitting next to me and I hissed at him. "Where the hell have you been? You've wrecked Adlai's whole meeting!" He said, "Please don't be mad at me, Clara. Wait till I tell you." I didn't think I'd ever want to speak to him again.

As soon as the meeting was over he put his arms around me, which caused quite a sensation in the crowd, and he said: "This is what happened. We were driving along the road between Vacaville and Sacramento, and all of a sudden, without saying one word, our driver pulled to the edge of the road (it wasn't freeway at that point) where it was thickly wooded with a lot of bushes, and he dashed off into the bushes. We knew why he went, he had to relieve himself, but he didn't come back. So, we all fanned out into the bushes and we yelled and hollered and we looked for him and nobody could find him. He had the key to the car. We stood alongside the road, and finally somebody stopped who was a mechanic and knew how to get the car started."

I think Robert Ryan drove in and they got lost en route, and I suppose they were twenty or twenty-five minutes late at that point. They didn't have a place to park when they got to the State Capitol Building, and they had to leave the car with a policeman. Anyway, they finally got there. I could picture this scene. I was in hysterics when he told me about it. He told the story so well, much better than I'm doing it, with all the embellishments and drama. I don't know who that student driver was. We never could find out who he was. We wanted to get hold of him and wring his neck. [Laughs] But, he must have been embarrassed. He couldn't face them, and he just got lost in the bushes. These are some of the off-the-record things that happen on a campaign.

Joe Louis in the Central Valley: Problems and Pleasures

Shirpser: I remember one tremendous experience during the campaign. One of my jobs was to channel speakers as they came in and allocate where they were going, and call into different districts to see who wanted them most. Of course, I had dozens of requests for speakers. I was always calling back and forth from the Speaker's Bureau of the Democratic National Committee trying to get people. Then if they would stay long enough to go to both Northern and Southern California we could divide expenses. And it was up to us to handle their train fare and hotel bills, and all the incidentals that went with it. We did not pay any fee, of course.

I got a call from the Speaker's Bureau and they said they had a great bonus for us--Joe Louis, who was the world champion heavyweight prizefighter, who had switched to Adlai. He had been a Republican and he heard Adlai speak and he was stirred deeply. Joe said he would do everything he could to help Adlai. The chairman of the Speaker's Bureau asked me, "Where would he be most valuable?" I discussed this with George Miller and we agreed that we should go through the Central Valley, which had had very little attention and where there are large concentrations of Negroes--I still say Negroes instead of Blacks--in Fresno, in Bakersfield, in Modesto, and so on. A lot of them are farmworkers and they chose to live in these areas because jobs were more available. Since Joe Louis was such a hero to these people as well as the other citizens of the Central Valley, this was the best place to go. This was a heavily Democratic area too, so this seemed a good decision.

With Joe Louis was an Illinois state senator named Corneal Davis, a very able and eloquent speaker. I think he had been a minister at one time. He was coming out to handle Joe Louis's arrangements and his itinerary as well as to make speeches.

Chall: He was black?

Shirpser: He was black, yes. They also suggested that I ask Ed Roybal, who was then on the Board of Supervisors in Los Angeles County because there were large concentrations there of Americans of Mexican ancestry. They thought Ed Roybal would be a drawing card and so I said that was just fine and I called Ed and he said he'd be delighted. (He's now a fine congressman.) So, we all arranged to meet in San Francisco and start from there.

Shirpser: I made all the arrangements with the different county chairmen for the districts. They sent a car down driven by a Negro sheriff. Then I kept running into problems. For instance, Lionel Steinberg was chairman of the Fresno Democratic County Central Committee and he told me, "You're not going to like what I have to tell you, but I cannot get a reservation in any of the good hotels or big restaurants in downtown Fresno because of the minority question." I said, "I can't believe it. In 1952, we are bringing Joe Louis, and a Negro congressman, and a member of the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors, and a Democratic National Committeewoman and you can't get us reservations?" He said, "I can get you moderately good hotel rooms, but I can't get you a public dining room for the dinner meeting."

I said, "What are we going to do?" He said, "Do you mind if we go to a very good restaurant in the Mexican area?" I said, "Of course I mind, but obviously we'll have to say that we chose this because the food is so good and because the owner is a Democrat. We'll just say that we did this deliberately and we won't say there was any problem." Lionel agreed.

So, that's what happened. We had to accept this discrimination. You do the best you can with what you've got! It was an excellent dinner, and a good meeting, well attended. We had a couple of stops en route to Fresno, and stayed overnight in the hotel there. In the morning, the driver, the sheriff, called and said he'd have the car there in ten minutes and to please meet him in front of the hotel. We all got downstairs and we were standing there in a group, on the sidewalk, on the main street in Fresno in front of the hotel. I was standing there with two Negroes and one American of Mexican ancestry--and a woman walked by, a Caucasian, and she spat full at me, and called me a filthy name. These people with me were so embarrassed. They kept trying to wipe me off. Fortunately, I had ducked, and it didn't go on my face where she had aimed at me. It was all over my neck and my dress. And they started to apologize and I said, "You shouldn't apologize. I apologize to you, that in a city like Fresno, in California, in 1952, that anyone could be so bigoted. She was a Caucasian and I apologize to you. She's beneath contempt. Don't say another word about it."

So, we got in the car; Joe, Illinois state senator, Corneal Davis, and Ed Roybal were in the back seat, and they put me in front with the driver. I turned around, and we were discussing

Shirpser: various aspects of the campaign and I noticed on Joe Louis's lapel the first Adlai Stevenson button that was changeable that I ever saw. I'll show it to you later. You see Adlai's face one way and if the person moves then you see the slogan: "Stevenson for President" on the other side. I'd never seen one before and I said, "Oh, that's a stunning button. May I look at it?" So, Joe took it off and handed it to me and he said, "This is one of the most precious things I have because Adlai Stevenson pinned it on my lapel in Illinois and said it was the first button that had come off the press. I really treasure it."

I looked at it and I said, "I'm going to write to headquarters right away and order thousands of these. We can sell them at a profit, I'm sure. No one in California has ever seen any campaign buttons like this. They're wonderful." To finish this story, at the end of the trip (and I want to tell you many details about this trip) we were sitting in the car on the way to the airport and I got a tap on my shoulder and there was Joe Louis, and he has the button in his hand and he handed it to me.

I said, "Oh, Joe you showed it to me earlier and I admire it very much. And I'll order many of them." He said, "Mrs. Shirpser, you are a true friend of my people and I'm giving you something that is very precious to me. I want you to take it." Of all the campaign buttons that I have that one I treasure most because it was given from the heart. Joe had plenty of money and fame but he was giving me something that meant a great deal to him, and I was very deeply touched by it.

He was quite an inarticulate person; he said very little. And he was so huge. When I stood behind him his shoulders were twice as wide as I, and when he shook hands with me, my hand was so completely engulfed by his that it looked as though I didn't have a hand. He was very sweet natured and he was very quiet. I'm sure Corneal Davis helped him with the speeches he made. He spoke briefly and what he said was to the point; he really was a sensation wherever he went.

Chall: He did gather crowds?

Shirpser: Oh, tremendous crowds wherever we were. The meeting in Fresno was a great success and many people were there. And then we drove to Bakersfield the next morning. It was one of the hottest days of the summer. No cars were airconditioned then. By the time we got to the outskirts of Bakersfield I thought

Shirpser: I was going to faint I was so hot and tired. Just before we got into Bakersfield there were two cars parked on the side of the road and people standing there. We had a big sign on the car "Elect Stevenson for President" so they knew who we were and they waved to us to stop, and we pulled up.

This man, a black, introduced himself as the local Democratic chairman for a Fresno assembly district, I think. He had arranged a luncheon at his home for all of us to meet the local people. I said, "You know, I think it's a wonderful thing you've done, getting all the important local Democrats together, but would you mind terribly if I skipped it because I am so hot and tired that if I don't get to the hotel and take a shower I'm not going to be on my feet for the rally this afternoon where I will introduce Joe." He said very coldly: "Of course, I understand, Mrs. Shirpser." So, I realized that I'd offended him.

I said, "You're taking it the wrong way. Really, I want to come and have lunch with you and your friends. Would you do this for me? Would you let me come to lunch and then let me leave early and get to the hotel, because I just have to clean up and have a few minutes to rest or I'm not going to make it. I had a very busy day yesterday and I'm awfully tired." He said, "Of course." So, we got to their home and it was a beautiful home, and one of the most elegantly appointed lunches I have ever attended. There were a lot of people there, perhaps fifty or more, mostly blacks. Later, an old friend, Congressman Harlan Hagan, came in and several other Democratic officials arrived.

During the luncheon everyone made me as welcome as could be. My hostess came up and said, "Please come back and have some more food. You need your strength..." I was sitting with Corneal Davis and Ed Roybal and a couple of other guests. I got up and went back to the buffet table laden with delicious food, and I took a little more of two or three salads. There was a shellfish salad that Corneal Davis had said was really good--California crab. So, I filled a small plate and I brought it back to the table and I said, "Senator Davis, I noticed that you liked this salad so I brought you a little more. I hope you will enjoy it." He put his fork and knife down and he looked at me with the strangest expression. I was afraid that I'd offended him. I thought; "He probably thinks I think he eats too much or he's greedy or something. Why couldn't I mind my own business? Why did I have to do this?"

Shirpser: So, he got to his feet and he took his spoon and he rapped on his water glass and he said, "Friends, I want to talk to you." And I thought I'd done something insulting to him and he was going to criticize me. He said, "I want you to know that your Democratic National Committeewoman, Clara Shirpser, did an extraordinary thing just now. She went to the buffet table and she filled a plate with food and she brought it back to me and she served me with her own hands. I've traveled up and down this United States for many years, I've met dozens of National Committee members, but never before has a member of the Democratic National Committee, especially a committeewoman, waited on me with her own hands. I want to make a toast to the best national committeewoman in the whole United States who really practices democracy."

I was so touched that tears were rolling down my face. I hadn't done anything to merit this praise. This was just a simple little act of friendship, to bring him a little food I knew he had enjoyed. I thought, "How badly he must have been treated, that what I did could even be noticeable."

And do you know that afternoon when he spoke at the big rally he went through that whole incident again and told all those people about it? Again, he said, "Mrs. Shirpser is a true friend of our people. Always remember this." I thought, "If only we did more simple friendly things for each other, regardless of race, much of the present resentment and hostility would end."

Estes Kefauver Campaigns for Stevenson

Shirpser: Well, perhaps we ought to talk about the Estes Kefauver campaign for Adlai.

Chall: All right.

Shirpser: This was a very wonderful thing for Estes to do, I think. Remember Estes had won eleven out of fifteen primaries. In California, he carried every county, fifty-eight of them. He beat the official slate with something like two and a half to one. And no other man in history, as far as I've been able to discover, has ever carried that many primaries, eleven out of fourteen. You know the bitterness that was engendered

Shirpser: at that 1952 convention, which Estes lost. A few weeks later Estes received Adlai's request to travel around the United States and campaign for him, and Estes accepted, and campaigned loyally and tirelessly.

This took a really big man, and proved how unselfish Estes was, as he put the interests of the party ahead of his own. He believed that Adlai Stevenson would make a fine president. Exhausted as he was, he campaigned hard whenever he came to California. I always met him wherever he was and traveled with him in any part of the state. I noticed [among my papers] that in October he spoke in San Jose to a large group and, as always, he stressed that we must forget what had happened in the primaries--that the bitterness should be dissolved--and he was asking them, the people that were loyal to him, to not only vote for Adlai but to work in the campaign and to contribute. He said that Adlai was an excellent man, that he believed in him, and he urged his former delegates and supporters to do likewise.

We were in San Jose, Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, San Diego. Later he came back and we did some of the northern places, including San Francisco. Estes always got big crowds because he was greatly beloved, especially in California.

Then we went to Richmond, that was George Miller's state senate county, and we had a huge meeting there. I remember that after this meeting we went to a prize fight in the Richmond Auditorium which happened to be going on that night. They asked Estes to climb into the ring in between rounds and be introduced to the crowd, and he did, amidst much applause. We never knew what was going to happen to us!

A Time correspondent was with us, because Estes always got national coverage which was very good for Adlai, too. I had been campaigning with Estes for several days. This was always a happy experience for me to campaign with Estes and his campaign group. Estes always looked out for me, often saying: "Where's Clara?" Or, "I want Clara to ride with me in my car." This did not always please the other feminine members of his party. He told me that I not only was his close friend, but that he could depend on me to give him the facts. This is rather rare in politics, where there are so many "coat-tail" hangers on. I hated to give Estes information that would be depressing. But I knew that he trusted me completely, and I believed I should tell him the truth as I saw it. He knew he could depend on my loyalty,

Shirpsen: and the depth of my belief in him, and mistakenly-or-not, he valued my judgement.

There was an advantage for me in Estes' height, 6 feet, 4 inches. When I lost him in the crowd, as I often did, I could look up above the crowd, and find my candidate looming above them.

We had been to Sacramento, Stockton, and were working our way up north. That night when I came home I stopped in to see my mother. We were talking and she said to me, "You know when you came in you did the funniest thing; you shook hands with me." I said, "Well, that's because I've been with Estes for days and he shakes hands with everyone, and now, so do I." [Laughs] I told some people about it, and somebody mentioned it to the Times Magazine reporter and he wrote a little story about that to the effect that when I came home after being with Estes for several days of campaigning, I was so indoctrinated to shaking hands that I shook hands with my own mother.

As we were talking of Estes and how much he did to help Adlai and how sincerely he did it, I was thinking of Eugene McCarthy and what he did in 1968. I knew Gene well, thought highly of him, and we were really very good friends. I always saw him when I went to Washington. I'll tell you how I met him later. (It was shortly after the 1952 campaign ended. I started with the greatest admiration and friendship for him.)

But, I thought about what happened after he lost that 1968 convention. Heavens knows, if anyone realizes how bitter it is to lose a convention which you feel is stacked against you, I should. This was truly a far more open convention in almost every way than the 1952 one was. His people were allowed to speak. They did get the mike. They did introduce resolutions. And Eugene lost. The violence and police brutality were certainly dreadful. We didn't have that in 1952.

But, here was Eugene McCarthy who hadn't won nearly as many primaries as Estes had. (We'll have to check into that.) But he had a superb organization with adequate funds and staff, where Estes had practically none. Estes had done the whole thing on his own merit, really. Eugene McCarthy's opponent, who became the nominee of the party, was Hubert Humphrey, who was his senior senator from Minnesota and who had helped Eugene to attain his U.S. Senate seat. While Eugene was a congressman they were close friends, as you will see later.

Shirpsen: But Eugene waited until four or five days before the actual election date to support Hubert, and then gave his support in a half-hearted manner over a television program. In my own family there are three or four relatives who were for McCarthy, but who did not vote because they didn't think Eugene wanted them to support Humphrey. It could have made all the difference if Eugene had supported Hubert as Estes did [Adlai] and campaigned for Hubert.

The small percentage that Nixon won by in 1968 could very easily have been reversed to a Humphrey victory. I think this points out even more that as you look at the two men, how great a man Estes Kefauver was. Another ironical thing was, when I got to know Gene he always wondered why I was so loyal to Estes. I gave up the National Committee post in '56 to support Estes. Gene never could understand this, because he evidently didn't much like Estes. One of the reasons he gave was that Estes was not a team player. He didn't go along with the majority in the Senate. He always did what he thought he should. Certainly there was never anyone who was less a team player in history than Gene McCarthy in his later years.

But the sidelight you get on people's characters when you know them well and when you know some of their past history can be fascinating.

Adlai Stevenson's Approach to the Campaign

Chall: Were the issues as clearly defined between Estes Kefauver and Adlai Stevenson, in 1952, as they were, in 1968, between McCarthy and Humphrey? Was there that much difference in the approach of the Democratic party to issues which each candidate was espousing?

Shirpsen: I think that Adlai and Estes saw eye-to-eye in 1952 far more than Gene McCarthy and Hubert Humphrey in '68. I would think on the basic issues they were pretty much in accord. Maybe the way to achieve them wasn't always the same, but it seems to me if you take the platform as the official thinking of the Democratic party, on issues, they were much in accord. But I would think Adlai and Estes were more in accord. I think Estes was probably more liberal than Adlai. But later, in 1956, when they were running together they had very little difference of opinion on issues.

Shirpser: I think that Adlai's policy "let's talk sense to the American people" was very much what Estes stood for, too. I think that was probably the keynote of Adlai's campaign, that he fought the campaign, not just whether you win or lose, important as that is, but whether you educate the people, whether you bring the information to them that they haven't previously had. This is especially important when you have the opportunity of nationwide television and of speaking to many millions of people--to try to alert them to the importance of what the issues really stand for, and the great contrast between Adlai and Eisenhower.

Chall: Well, as long as we're talking about it [his attitude about the campaign] I wanted to discuss with you a column that was written by James Reston in the Chronicle of Sunday, October 1, 1972. He says that Adlai Stevenson was fairly convinced that it was time for the Republicans to have the country, that is, for them to have the White House and to be in the White House. And that with Eisenhower it would be all right. But the only reason that he convinced himself to take the nomination was in order to be sure that Taft wouldn't have an influence.

"He decided consciously on a campaign that he knew would fail, but might clarify the main issues," primarily because he didn't expect to beat Eisenhower. Secondly, Reston said that "Stevenson decided early in the 1952 election that he would probably lose, but that he would lose with a purpose: he would define the central issues of the coming four years as he saw them, and win or lose, as he put it then, 'talk sense to the American people.'" That he then "set a standard for honest campaigning that has not been equalled or even approached since that time." Now, that's part of it. And I was wondering whether you had any inkling as you were with Stevenson that he thought he might lose, that he expected to lose and that he campaigned as he did it, this first time around, with this purpose in mind?

Shirpser: I was out of the country; I was on a trip, so, I've never seen that article of Reston's. I agree with the second part. I just said that really his objective was to educate and to inform, and to talk sense to the American people. As to his becoming a nominee, I don't know what his thinking was. I know there was tremendous pressure on him by the political officials at the 1952 convention. I think that he was told that he was the only man that could win.

Shirpser: Adlai campaigned to win. I'm confident of that. He did not enter the campaign and go through the terrible rigors, the disappointments, the suffering...A campaign such as he waged is not an educational jaunt. He really worked. Your baggage often has to be in the lobby at seven o'clock in the morning. I noticed when we went South we left San Francisco at seven-thirty in the morning, at the depot. That meant that our baggage was probably in the lobby at six in the morning. We had to get up, get breakfast, get to the station. He didn't refuse any of the schedules that we handed him. They were really terribly rigorous in California. We have the reputation that "we kill our candidates in California." It's such a big state and there are so many areas to cover. I can't imagine a man going through that campaign--he came out here at least three times in the general election--if he was not seeking victory in the election. I think more and more as the campaign went on he was determined to win.

I have so many letters from him in which he told me of his gratitude to me. In one of them he said, "I'll not soon forget all the adventures we shared throughout California." And in another one he said, "I think we did the best we could to stem the tide. I have no regrets. I know I did the best I could." Those aren't the kind of letters you get from a man who thought he was going to lose from the beginning.

I admire "Scotty" Reston and I think he's an excellent reporter and columnist. But there have been so many wrong things written about Adlai Stevenson. I do feel that I knew him. He opened his heart to me later as I got to know him better, on many occasions. He really unburdened himself in a way that touched me. He knew I cared about him and admired and respected him, and he knew that this would mean a great deal to me to have him tell me what he really thought. He often asked me what I thought. I have a wire in which he asked my advice, which I found almost unbelievable. What did I know about politics in relationship to him? But I had a wonderful friendship with him, and with Bill Blair, too. I must refute the fact that Adlai thought he was doing only an educational, informative sort of campaign. No one could work that hard and try that hard and suffer as he did if he wasn't really determined to win. The fact that Adlai ran again in 1956 is evidence of his will to win.

Losing the Election

Shirpser: That brings to mind something else. Ben Swig invited all of us who'd had a major role in the campaign for Northern California to come to an election-night party. We knew that the polls claimed an Eisenhower victory, but we still hoped that a miracle was going to happen. Believing in Adlai as we did, we just couldn't accept the fact that the American people were going to support Ike's vague and ineffectual campaign--I think Ike's grin was so infectuous that people couldn't resist him. He was a great hero; he projected a father image to the people. I think that he was an unbeatable candidate. I don't think there was a man in the United States who could have run against Eisenhower and beaten him.

But still some of us thought the miracle could happen. After all, there was a tremendous upset in '48, just four years before, when Truman won. We were at Ben's party at the Fairmont Hotel and there was an open bar, and wonderful food, and two television sets in opposite corners of the room. We were all watching the TV and then as the returns got worse and worse, people left the television sets and either drank to console themselves or ate to forget. But there was a newspaper picture of two couples sitting with bowed heads, curved backs, completely dejected watching TV. They photographed them from the rear. The picture was of Ad and me and Neoma and Suren Saroyan. We were the only ones watching the television set at that time. At the other end of the room there was laughter, and camaraderie and drinking, and eating. We couldn't eat. We couldn't drink. We were just sitting there in sorrow. When Adlai came on the screen and said, (I'm not sure of the exact words, but to the effect) "I'm too old to cry and it hurts too much to laugh"--Lincoln's famous quotation--I dissolved in tears.

You know, it becomes such a personal thing when you have spent months of your life working for and with someone, and you have this close bond with your candidate, and with Bill Blair, and Wilson Wyatt, and so many of the senators who came here to help; we all worshipped Adlai. He belongs to you, you know, in a way that you just can't explain. It's not a family relationship. It's not a love relationship. But he belongs to you. You've shared so many experiences. And when defeat come in this way you really suffer. Especially if you're a sensitive person. You feel very deeply. Ad felt just as badly

Shirpser: as I did. We were really depressed, and watching the others, all having a good time, they seemed so indifferent. How they could enjoy themselves at a time like this! We couldn't. As soon as Adlai made that concession speech we left and went home, and walked the floor. We couldn't even to go sleep we were so emotionally drained. You just sort of lose confidence in the wisdom and judgment of the American people.

Chall: Did Adlai ever say, as I am told he said, "I am emotionally and mentally unfit to be president." A statement which I am told haunted him all through his campaign. Are you aware of that?

Shirpser: I heard rumors along those lines when he was trying to evade being a candidate in 1952. He was a humble person. I think I told you that. He was such a perfectionist that sometimes he lacked confidence in himself. I never heard him say that he was emotionally and mentally unfit to be president. I would doubt that he ever said that.

The second time, in 1956, I remember him saying, "There must be someone better than I to run, someone who would be a better president." This was part of his make-up. How could he be physically or mentally unfit. Look what he went through in '52.

He was in excellent physical health, and mentally, too. I simply can't believe it. He had the most brilliant mind, the most perceptive mind. He was not an egotist. He was humble in his own evaluation of himself. Remember, the only political office he had held at that point was governor of Illinois, and he had been an excellent governor. So, there was no reason to think that he couldn't go on to a higher office and fill it most effectively.

Look at his background. His grandfather had been secretary of state. He'd been brought up in a family that was oriented toward public service. I find it hard to believe he ever said that.

The Importance of Wives and Families

Chall: What about the fact that he was divorced at that time? This was more of a problem in American politics than it is today.

Shirpser: I have no doubt it hurt him. His former wife was contemptible, I think, in speaking disparagingly of Adlai during the campaign. He didn't have his wife with him, and this is a deterrent. A wife can really be a fine asset, those who campaign with their husbands, and cooperate well, are a great "bonus."

Chall: What's the asset?

Shirpser: Well, the asset is, in the first place, women like to see a woman who is happily married, who has a family, who has a good relationship with her husband. I mean, as human beings, you find this attractive. Then, the wife can speak to groups. She can be interviewed. You bring the women's angle into the campaign and encourage more women to participate.

For instance, I think that Eleanor McGovern was great in this last campaign. I don't mean this derogatorily, but I think maybe she was a greater success in the campaign than her husband was. She campaigned with him, and also campaigned on her own for him. It depends on the wife herself. Now, Mrs. John Sparkman was extremely shy. She seemed to dislike politics, she would never be interviewed. She was terrified of flying. It was an ordeal for her to campaign. So, she was there physically, but she didn't give much of herself. Their daughter was great. She was beautiful and she was very outgoing and friendly, where Mrs. Sparkman wasn't. But the fact that Mrs. Sparkman was there, did help.

I think one thing that counts in this evaluation is that Governor Stevenson's three sons stayed with him. All three of them campaigned with him. John Fell was only fourteen at the time, and he was always with Adlai; and Borden, and of course Adlai III, who went on to be the United States Senator from Illinois. They were all indoctrinated into politics in this 1952 campaign. So, the fact that the sons did not stay with the mother, which is the usual, normal way would seem to me to indicate that Adlai was the injured party in that divorce.

He was not the one who sought the divorce. I'll tell you something India told me about his wife, Ellen. She was the

Shirpser: daughter of a wealthy family, the Borden family, and had been a "spoiled" girl. She married Adlai and they lived happily, seemingly. She fancied herself as a patroness of the arts. She had the money to donate to young artists, and she had a salon with poets at her feet who read poems dedicated to her, and this was very important in her life. She was the one who had the limelight in that family. She was the one who was interviewed. She was the one whose picture was taken.

When Adlai ran for governor of Illinois and won, she was no longer the most important one in that family. India thought she couldn't take the secondary role. Later, she did collapse and was in a mental institution for a while. So, it seems to me that Adlai put up with a great deal from her, but she sought the divorce.

I've always felt, especially after I got to know Adlai well, that anyone who could be married to Adlai Stevenson and who left him couldn't be quite normally balanced! [Laughs] Because he really had the highest type of women around him, attractive and intelligent women, like Marietta Tree, like Mrs. Edison Dick, who was his national campaign Women's Division chairman, like Mary Lasker, in New York, Mrs. Agnes Meyer, publisher of the Washington Post. I think some of the finest women I've ever met were Adlai's friends, supporters and campaigners.

The Speeches

Chall: Well now, we've talked about Wilson Wyatt and Bill Blair as a part of his campaign. Who was John Bartlow Martin who was supposed to be his speech writer? Did you know him?

Shirpser: No, I didn't. But I can tell you those speeches were worked over by Adlai until one minute before Adlai got on television or made a speech. He was adding or deleting; he was writing notes in the margin right up to the last minute. This last year when I stopped in Hawaii on the way to the Orient, Carol Evans, Adlai's secretary during the campaign, was in Hawaii working with Walter Johnson. He's a professor of political science at the University of Hawaii. He is doing the official definitive books on Adlai Stevenson based on his papers. There will probably be eight books.

Shirpser: Gregg Sinclair was the president emeritus of the University of Hawaii and he is a very old and dear friend. He asked Carol to lunch with us and we had a great time reliving so many experiences. She always traveled on the trains and campaigns with Adlai, as his personal secretary. In this context she was speaking of Adlai's sense of perfectionism and how difficult it was for her. She was retyping speeches always, right up to the last minute. Of course, she worshipped Adlai, too.

I think that his speeches were most eloquent, most inspirational, and incorporated the most beautiful use of English. Perhaps, he and Winston Churchill were the masters of the English language. Many new ideas came out extemporaneously when Adlai spoke. He hardly ever finished a speech on time on television, which was one of our great problems because there was always a punch line at the end, with the summing up. And it rarely ever got to the television audience because he'd think of so many other things to say and could not finish in time.

Without knowing Mr. Martin, I really think that Adlai wrote most of his own speeches. I'm sure that all kinds of tentative speeches were given to him and that they were excellent speeches, but before Adlai gave them they were his speeches. I really feel that that's a fair evaluation, as I knew him. I don't think Mr. Martin traveled with us. I don't remember him.

Clara's Duties and Activities

Shirpser: We were going to talk a little about my activities, weren't we?

Chall: Yes, I wanted to ask you then, aside from the whistle-stop train and all of that, you said to a reporter in the Chronicle of September 9, 1952, "I have a date with a collapse on November 5."

Shirpser: I'm sure that was true. As I look back over these records I can hardly believe I did all that I did. But, I evidently learned to concentrate and to use my time without too much interference. Of course, Ad was so cooperative it helped tremendously. He often took phone calls for me and shielded me at home so that I could have some rest. But, I wrote my own speeches. I did have a great deal of help from Bill Hyatt. He and his wife, Grace, are still two of my very dearest friends, and it was a wonderfully congenial friendship.

Shirpser: They moved to California early in the Kefauver campaign. We had a mutual friend, Judge Everett McKeage, and he asked me to lunch to meet Bill, who had had many political posts. He'd been the administrative assistant to a congressman from Kansas, where Grace and Bill formerly lived. Bill had known President Truman. Grace's brother was a colleague in the National Committee, Carl Rice, who was Democratic National Committeeman from Kansas.

Bill was a well-known attorney in his home state. They had family in California and they decided they wanted to move to California, and they liked San Francisco best. So, Bill was going to take the bar examination and while he was studying for it, he had a lot of free time and he became very interested in Kefauver. At this lunch he said, "Would you like me to help you?"

This was manna from heaven! With open arms, I wanted him to help me. He came to the office and said, "You haven't got a mimeograph machine." And he bought a used mimeograph machine in good condition and gave it to me as a gift. I scopped everyone on press releases because Bill was a devoted radio and television listener. Maybe at nine o'clock at night he'd read or hear something and he'd call me and he'd say, "This is what I just heard, what do you want to say?" I would say, "Nine o'clock at night? Can't it wait until the morning?" He'd say, "Nope. I'm going down to the office and type it and bring your press release to every one of the newspapers and you'll be the first to be quoted."

He did this regularly. I have a whole sheaf of press releases. When letters arrived that had to be answered, Bill would say, "What do you want to say to this one and what do you want to say to that one?" He'd write my letters for me. I think that he could write them better than I could. You can't imagine what a help this was to me. I did have a typist in the office, but she could not take shorthand.

Another thing, when Ad was busy and could not get away to take me traveling to various meetings, the Hyatts would drive me. They did not have children so they could easily get away, and they loved the political atmosphere. They would often drive me to the airport to meet the VIPs. You see, this is one of the things I did regularly, to meet all of our visitors. Since California is so far from Washington the visiting senators and

Shirpser: governors and congressmen do attract big crowds. The problem was that we usually had to pay their expenses. This often fell in my lap, to raise the necessary funds.

The Speakers' Circuit

Shirpser: But one of the functions of being a national committeewoman is that all requests for speakers should be channeled through your office. They weren't always, as you can imagine, but they should have been. Sometimes they would call from Washington and they'd say, for instance, "Senator Monroney is available the first of October. Do you want him?" I would answer, "Of course we want him. I'll work out a schedule." Then I would have to call different areas; mostly, we would try to keep them in the Bay Area, but I would also call Los Angeles. John Anson Ford and I worked together well. He was most cooperative. I really haven't spoken enough of him.

Chall: Well, we will.

Shirpser: He's been such a good friend and we worked together so harmoniously. I would say, "I can get Senator Monroney at a certain date." Of course, he would have gotten a call too. "Will it be a conflict if he came either before or after, and will you share his expenses?" The expenses really were just plane fare and the hotel bills and food; always phone calls back and forth from Washington were a big item.

We usually got good television coverage. I had a very good relationship there with KPIX, Willian Winter, and Phil Lasky. I could always depend on them to interview and cover our meetings. In Southern California I'm sure John Anson Ford had the same arrangements.

Then, sometimes the requests would come from the other direction. Someone from Fresno would say, "Look, we haven't had a good meeting around here for ages. Who can you bring?" So, then I would call, perhaps, Merced, and Bakersfield, or Tulare, or all three of them, and say, "Look, you can have so-and-so for lunch, or you can have him for dinner, and the next morning somebody can have him for breakfast or brunch. You'll have to help share the expenses."

Shirpser: It was a lot of work arranging these tours. You had to have transportation. Usually they had to fly to save time. Or for shorter distances, the county chairman or his committee would certainly drive them. But that was one of the most time consuming things I had to do, and yet it was one of the most valuable things. I mean, it's important to have a nationally known speaker come and talk to us. They brought crowds and television coverage which we didn't have the money to buy. Also, it gave us a chance to do more organization work in those areas as we went there. It helped build up organization. So that was one of the chief things I did.

Then, I was asked to make lots of speeches. I did this just as often as I could; mostly in the beginning, they were womens' groups. I look back with great satisfaction to Stockton, for instance. I don't believe they had a women's group, or if they had, it was small and inactive. I usually would check with the county committee and the congressional co-chairmen, who were a man and woman in each congressional district. I would say, "Now, who are the people I could turn to to get together a good women's meeting? They're calling me and saying that they need a speaker."

I would try to work with everyone. You know, in that area after the campaign when John McFall ran for Congress, he told me later that the women's group I organized was one of the most active groups in his whole campaign, and probably the most helpful. He's now one of the deputy whips of the House. Alan Short, also from Stockton, became a state senator, and gave credit to that women's group, too. Until then, there were very few Democratic office holders in that area.

So, I feel that was groundwork for the future that I was doing. The same thing is true in Sacramento. They had a small women's group, quite inactive, and I went there a couple of times and it helped them to expand, and this became one of the largest groups in Northern California. I always got a sense of accomplishment when I went there. You know it's rather a heady thing, you can't help being a little bit stirred and flattered when you've been there once or twice before and when you walk in everyone gets to their feet and claps. You know, it makes you feel good. This didn't happen every place. But it certainly happened in enough places to make me feel that I was doing something worthwhile.

Shirpser: I didn't refuse engagements if I could possibly help it. I did travel a lot and I tried to concentrate when I went South, particularly. Because I was paying all my own traveling expenses, and this took quite a large sum. In fact, we gave up a trip to South America. We had set aside some money and we had intended to go at the time I became Democratic National Committeewoman. I said to Ad, "You know if I become national committeewoman, we can't go. I'm going to have lots of expenses, and many responsibilities so I can't get away. Are you willing to give up this South American trip, and have me use these funds for my political expenses?" Ad said, "I'll give up the trip, gladly." We never did make that planned trip to South America incidentally.

Chall: I wonder about this matter of paying your own way. Also I've noticed in some of your correspondence, at the time of the campaign, that you were sending your own money in as well as raising some.

Shirpser: I did.

Chall: And I thought a husband who would allow his wife to spend these fairly good-sized sums of money was very tolerant.

Shirpser: I'm sure that Ad would have, if necessary. But I did have my own funds. I'd been married before and my husband had left me a comfortable estate. So, I was free to draw on my own funds. But, I'm sure that if it had been a question of deciding to give or spend funds politically that Ad would have gone along, at least up to the point we could have afforded. But, I don't think that a woman who has no funds of her own could be an effective national committeewoman. I think that it's deplorable that this is so.

But, I was told, for instance, when Marjorie Benedict was national committeewoman of the Republican party (she, too, lived in Berkeley), that she received a salary from the Republican party. Well, I don't know if you could call it a salary, but I heard that her expenses were paid up to a given amount. A close friend of hers told me that. Think how much easier that makes it for you to do a good job.

Suppose I was away on a trip and Washington was calling me. No one could be home to answer the phone or take a message. Or suppose I needed to have committee meetings. People wouldn't often come from San Francisco to Berkeley, but people from the

Shirpser: East Bay are sort of used to going to San Francisco for meetings. I had an office in which they could meet comfortably and we could do our planning. I think that a national committee member simply has to have an office. We had quite a blow-up about that later. But, I stuck to my guns and I carried my point. I know the national committeeman almost always had an office so why shouldn't the national committeewoman?

This is the kind of thing I kept running into. The idea was that a woman could work out of her home where a man couldn't work out of his business office. He had to have his separate office with a secretary, and often with some sort of a public relations man. I think Ellie Heller had both paid positions. I, fortunately, had Bill Hyatt helping me, in 1952, who did the public relations. He was full of ideas, too, which was so beneficial. He helped me write speeches, and he was very good about my cutting out what I didn't like and putting in what I did. We worked wonderfully well together. It was a joy.

Chall: Well, let's see--you did speak quite a bit, and as a result of that, I suppose, assisted in whatever organization was going on. You didn't have time to organize women's groups, though, or organize clubs at that stage of the campaign, did you?

Shirpser: Yes, I organized quite a few clubs during the 1952 campaign, calling them "Stevenson clubs." I made a point of always saying: "We need you and want you. Please get to work and elect an official president and vice-president, even if it's a small group. Get going and assign responsibilities." I always worked on that theme.

Chall: I have a note here, I don't know whether it's more important than anything else you did, but you debated with Mr. Dinkelspiel. That means a Republican vs. a Democrat at some kind of a meeting where they needed a non-partisan or bi-partisan approach.

Shirpser: That was true. John Dinkelspiel was vice-chairman for Northern California for Eisenhower and Nixon, and I was national committee-woman for Stevenson. He was a good speaker and we had mutual friends. We were courteous to each other. Naturally, each of spoke strongly for his candidate, but I had armed myself with something before I left. I still have the photostatic copy. This meeting was at a Jewish community center. Mr. Dinkelspiel was speaking of Nixon's virtues. Mr. Nixon is not one of my favorite people; I know too much about him.

Shirpser: I pulled out this photostatic copy of a covenant which had been in the newspaper, and it is one of the most restrictive covenants I have ever seen, located not in Washington, D.C., but in his home in Whittier, California. I can show it to you. It is to the effect that no one who was not Caucasian, or who was of Semitic origin, could live in their home except as a domestic servant.

Chall: In the Nixon home?

Shirpser: In the Nixon home in Whittier, California. I read this to this Jewish audience, and, of course, it created quite a sensation. Mr. Dinkelspiel is an attorney and he said, "Let me see it." I showed it to him. He said, "Well, of course, all the senators in Washington live in homes with a restricted covenant." I said, "I have discussed that and I'm sure what you're saying is true in many cases because practically all the good neighborhoods in which a family would want to live in Washington, D.C. do carry this restrictive covenant." I know it has been abolished, and I think even then it might have been abolished, in '52. "But," I said, "I've asked Senator Kefauver if he lives in a home with a restrictive covenant in Tennessee and he does not. And that is why I think this is such damning evidence. Perhaps, Senator Nixon couldn't get a good neighborhood where he wanted to live in Washington. But, he certainly did not have to have that restrictive covenant in Whittier, California."

Later I talked to a very good friend of John Dinkelspiel, Dave Friedenrich, who had been one of our Kefauver delegates. He has always been very helpful to me. I said, "Maybe this wasn't in good taste for me to use that newspaper clipping of the restrictive covenant while debating with Mr. Dinkelspiel before a Jewish audience. Maybe I offended Mr. Dinkelspiel." He said, "John had wonderful praise of you." So, I wrote to John Dinkelspiel and I said, "I appreciate your attitude because I was feeling rather guilty afterwards that maybe I hit below the belt bringing this up. But it was factual evidence." He answered with a fine letter that I have here, telling me most encouraging things and ended by saying, "I wish I knew how to persuade you to become a Republican. But I know you won't." [Laughter]

When you have had a hard and forceful debate about candidates and you can end on a good note...This was what I tried hard to do. Sometimes I wonder if I didn't succeed less well in the Democratic party than I did with Republican party officials!

Shirpser: I was on television. I was interviewed when there was some crucial issue, or when our candidate was here, and I would go with him to the television station. The commentator would sometimes turn to me and ask me what I thought. I was on radio quite a few times, especially when I was visiting other areas. I was interviewed frequently by the press. All of this I gladly did not for my own self, because I really didn't want any other higher office, but because it gave our Democratic candidates publicity which we couldn't get in other ways.

The national press was endorsing Eisenhower. Therefore, we tried to be newsworthy. Any of us who were out campaigning tried to say something that had not been said before, that was newsworthy, or that had to do with some particular issue in their area. I had always tried to explore the issues important to that area ahead of time. It was a constant struggle to get good publicity for the Democratic party, and we did not have the funds for paid TV and radio programs.

Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Corey phoned one day and said that they were Republicans and had always been Republicans, but they were disgusted with the Eisenhower campaign and the vague reactionary statements, and they admired Stevenson. They announced that they wanted to give me a large contribution for his campaign. Usually, I had to work hard to get contributions! So, I immediately asked them to come to San Francisco for lunch. They lived down on the peninsula. We organized a "Switch to Stevenson" club. We had a photograph taken of them with a big Stevenson poster in the background, and the press covered this story well. Mrs. Corey had been Clarissa Hale, the granddaughter of Marshall Hale, the founder of all the Hale department stores. This was a well-known Republican family, and that got us good publicity for Stevenson.

The Coreys worked hard enlisting Republicans to switch to Stevenson. Every time we got good new names, this gave us the basis for another news story. Once I spoke to the women's division at the Stanford Research Institute, which was an excellent group. I tried to get to bi-partisan groups wherever I could. I spoke to the American Association of University Women, the Zonta Club, the Soroptomists and the Rotary Club. Often, Marjorie Benedict would be asked, too, and we each would speak for our candidates and our parties. I always welcomed the opportunity to do that.

Alben Barkley in Alameda County

Shirpsers: Did I ever speak of Vice-President Alben Barkley when he was here?

Chall: No, not at all.

Shirpsers: Oh, that was an interesting sidelight. He came to campaign in Alameda County. The county committee chairman, who was Monroe Friedman, organized a big rally in the Oakland Auditorium. Beforehand he had a reception in Mr. Barkley's honor. About thirty people were there; all had some Democratic party responsibility. I hadn't met Mr. Barkley yet. I had heard so many delightful things about him and I was anxious to know him. I thought, Monroe will give me a signal when I should walk up and be introduced.

Soon a young man came over and he said, "Vice-President Barkley wants to know who you are." I said, "Oh, I'm Clara Shirpsers." I think this was before I was Democratic National Committeewoman. And he said, "Mr. Barkley wants you to come over and talk to him." There were mostly men at the reception, as usual; probably four or five women among thirty men. Vice-President Barkley said, "Listen, honey, you and I are the only young people in this whole room. I've looked them all over. Will you please stay alongside of me so I have someone I can talk to?" [Laughter]

It was so typical of him, and he had a merry twinkle in his eye. He put his arm around my waist. I was delighted to stay alongside of him. I don't know how anybody else liked it, but I liked it.

Chall: What was his real reason? Aside from the fact that you were an attractive woman and he probably felt like having one beside him?

Shirpsers: I don't know. I think he was getting bored and he looked over and saw me, and I was probably talking animatedly with somebody. There were so few women around. He always like women, you know.

Well, then later at the meeting I was supposed to speak. I've forgotten the subject, but I did speak and I was terrified because Vice-President Barkley was there on the platform, and he was one of the best speakers in the whole United States. For me to get up there and make my little speech with him

Shirpsen: listening was really an ordeal. After I sat down, he was introduced and he spoke. He was very gracious about acknowledging everyone on the platform. Then when he got to me he said, "I met Clara earlier this evening and I want to tell you I know she's got Kentucky blood in her." [Laughter] This was the highest compliment he could give me, but he continued saying nice things in praise of me.

The sequel to this was: Many years later, about 1959, my husband and I were in Tokyo, Japan, and we were invited to a party at the American Embassy. That's one of the bonuses that you get when you've been national committeewoman, and you travel; you write to the American Embassy that you're coming or preferably, you get your U.S. senator to write. In this case, Estes was always delighted to do that for us. In later years Alan Cranston has given me the same courtesy. I started Alan in politics. When we get to that I'm very eager to talk about him because I'm so proud of him.

We were invited to a lovely party and our ambassador was a relative of Douglas MacArthur; I think it was his nephew, also named Douglas MacArthur. Of course, he was Republican and this was during the Eisenhower years and I was very careful to be tactful and not to say anything that might antagonize anyone. Then when I was walking around the living room, I saw on the piano a picture of Vice-President Barkley. I sought out Mrs. MacArthur and I said, "There is the Veep, I know him well." She said, "He's my father." That made me feel at home, seeing this familiar face of an old and valued friend.

Chall: Were people like Vice-President Barkley, Humphrey, Eugene McCarthy, were they on the National Committee at the time that you were on the National Committee?

Shirpsen: No. None were members of the National Committee.

Chall: You just knew them through other ways then?

Shirpsen: There was only one man and one woman elected or appointed from each state. Now the National Committee has been greatly enlarged and I'm afraid it's become rather unwieldly. I believe there were forty-eight states then and representatives from Hawaii, and the Virgin Islands. This was before Hawaii and Alaska became states. Senators and governors were sometimes national committeemen, too, but not many.

- Shirpser: You know, the Young Democrats once wrote to me and asked me to define for them what a national committeewoman is.
- Chall: Yes, could we take that up when we get into the committee? Right now I'd like to see if we can polish off that 1952 campaign before we get into the committee.
- Shirpser: Yes. Surely.

Fund Raising and the Continual Need for Money

- Chall: I'd like to have you talk about the problems of fund raising. I don't want to go into the whole matter of money itself until later, but in this particular time, in 1952, you were thrust into a position in which you'd had no experience. And from what I can tell, not only did you have to make speeches and do all the other chores that you've outlined so far, but there was continual pressure on you to send money.
- I noticed there were letters from Mitchell and occasionally a telegram with an urgency about it, "We must have money for the last weeks of the campaign..." What a strain this must have been.
- Shirpser: It was terrible. Because it means sitting on the phone for endless hours calling people. And it means putting on fund-raising affairs.
- Chall: In addition to everything else.
- Shirpser: Yes, you raise funds for your candidate most effectively when he's here. I remember there was a question once when Mr. Truman was here, and we knew we could have put on a big fund-raising affair. But India said that for the president of the United States it would not be appropriate. When the U.S. senators came out to visit here we could. You always had the problem if you charged too much you wouldn't get a big crowd. If you didn't charge enough the cost of putting on the meeting, and the cost of the food, and printing the program, and sending out invitations can be fifteen to twenty percent of what you take in. Then, you have the expenses of their trip. Here's the National Committee putting on this pressure, "Send us money!" Well, we needed money in California, too. There was always a struggle

Shirpser: as to how to divide the funds we raised.

I would tell the National Committee, "I'll try to send you twenty-five percent." And George would say, "No, you can't do it. I've got to pay bills for the campaign right here!" Perhaps we would delay the division of funds and hope we would do better next time. That's where a wealthy national committeewoman does have added value, I think.

Chall: Why?

Shirpser: Well, because she herself contributes more money, and she probably knows and has more friends among wealthy people, and can use these contacts for raising more funds. I sent \$500 to the Stevenson campaign, which was a lot of money for me because I was spending additional money traveling around the state, sharing half the cost of the office.

We were trying to abolish cross-filing, and I believe it was John Despol who was the head of the Labor Committee to Abolish Cross-filing and who lived in Los Angeles. Sala Burton, who was one of my best volunteers, had told him of my difficulties. I believe that John Despol agreed to pay the cost of the office which had been George Miller's, and half the cost of the central office with Sala in charge of their campaign to abolish cross-filing in the Bay area. I think I've written about this earlier. So, that was a big help to me. And I had the opportunity to know Sala well.

I think, in fact, that their romance (Sala and Phil Burton) blossomed in my office because she was going with Phil and I did everything I could to help that along. Then, later, they married. She's a wonderful wife to him, and has always assisted in furthering his political career.

This money raising was a big problem. I was always struggling under it. I told you Mitchell's criticism of me was bitter, because we hadn't raised enough money early in the campaign before I even knew the people who would contribute. Later, the Kefauver delegates did their best to help the Stevenson campaign. But, we weren't a wealthy group, as the other slate had been. I got to know people like George Killion who was always helpful to me. He had been treasurer of the Democratic National Committee, and he gave me a list of names to call. He also put in a good word for me, which always helped.

Shirpser: I'm not sure how I got all the lists. I'm sure some came from the National Committee, people who had previously contributed. This was one of the most time-consuming things I had to do, and one of the most unpleasant.

Chall: And you had to do it yourself. You didn't have people that you could...

Shirpser: No, you had to do it yourself. You had to say, "This is Clara Shirpser, your new Democratic National Committeewoman. I've gotten a wire from Steve Mitchell, we won't be able to have a television program in ten days unless every state in the union sends some funds. Would you please help me with this?" This kind of an appeal would not be as effective if someone else did it--of course, George Miller was doing it on the state basis too. Often people were solicited from both sides and would divide their contributions, and this would make him angry. I could understand it, because we needed the money desperately in California. Yet, the national campaign had to receive funds from each state, of course.

Incidentally, I learned a lot from George Killion in this field, too. He was the most successful fund raiser I ever knew. As well as being the treasurer of the Democratic National Committee, he headed all kinds of civic and philanthropic drives. I said to him one day in desperation, "What's the secret of your success? I'm not raising nearly enough money." He said, "It's very simple. Just two words: 'I ask, (and I give, too.)'"

I said, "Well, I do, too! I give to anything that is worthwhile though not in the large sums you give." But he said, "I tell myself, 'Look, I'm not asking for myself. This is a cause I believe in.'" He said, "Don't hesitate to call anybody, anyone you think who would contribute or should contribute. Call them, say who you are, tell them why you need the funds." That advice gave me a lot of encouragement to do more than I would have done if he hadn't said this to me. Many times it worked.

At this point George was president of the American President Line and Ralph Davies was chairman of the board, and he was an independent. George said, "Have you called Ralph Davies?" So then I did call Mr. Davies, and he was very gracious. He sent a very substantial contribution to the Stevenson campaign. I always thought he should have been a Democrat! He was always very cooperative and we got to be good friends, too.

Shirpser: Sometimes you are received warmly. I remember we used to call Professor Alexander Kidd (Law School, U.C.) "Captain" Kidd. He was elderly. He lived up the hill from our home and his daughter and my daughter were close friends. Sometimes, I called him for contributions. He wrote me the sweetest letter and he said, "I'm glad to send this contribution. Thank you for the wonderful work you're doing for the Democratic party."

Occasionally, you did have something like that which was heartwarming, which encouraged you to go on struggling. I learned to do fairly well because I had to do it to contribute as generously as I could. I knew how desperately money was needed and I just did without something else and gave an extra donation.

You see, this seemed to be the test. I had sent in some money and I had contributed, too, and that made me do "a magnificent job." All the work I had done out in the field, the new clubs, all the publicity I had gotten, the new ideas I brought in, no word of thanks for that in his letter to me. But, the fact that I had sent in some substantial checks meant that I was doing "a magnificent job." The power of money in politics is one of the greatest evils in democracy, as I see it. It gets worse every year because the cost of campaigning goes up more. It prevents some of our best candidates from running. It obligates them when they are elected to do things, to vote in ways they wouldn't vote if they were not obligated to a few people who gave a lot of money. For years, I've been working to reform our election laws to try to minimize the giving of large sums and change the financing of elections.

I believe that election reforms are necessary, and I worked at both state and national levels. Finally we have gotten quite a few. But, just think, that started way back in '52. That campaign brought home to me the importance of money in politics and how a few people with a lot of money could control. This is the antithesis of democracy; and it's dangerous.*

Chall: Would the same people come to all of these fund-raising activities? Were you getting money by one means or another--by dinner, or

*This was taped before Watergate, and the exposé of the huge illegal corporation campaign contributions to the Nixon campaign--and the unethical pressures and methods used by his campaign committee to Reelect the President. C.S.

Mitchell File

DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL COMMITTEE
RING BUILDING
1200 EIGHTEENTH STREET, N. W.
WASHINGTON 6, D. C.

STEPHEN A. MITCHELL
CHAIRMAN

October 28, 1952

Dear Clara:

Many thanks for your good letter of October 23, with the information I requested and the report on your own activities. Thanks, too, for forwarding the checks from Mrs. Lonie and Dr. Marseille, which I have acknowledged.

If your efforts alone could determine the result in California, I would have no fears for the State.

You are doing a magnificent job.

Sincerely,



Stephen A. Mitchell

The Honorable Clara Shirpser
Democratic National Committeewoman
214 Balboa Building
San Francisco 5, California

Chall: rally, or whatever, from the same group of people all the time?

Shirpser: I think if you took the \$100-a-plate dinners which Matt McClosky introduced very successfully into Pennsylvania and which we adopted later, then I think you do get a great many of the same people. Except, depending on who the candidate is, his supporters are people that you bring into the party who weren't there before. At the rallies and inexpensive meetings, you get the faithful who actually participate in the campaigns, and who care about the candidate. We had mob scenes at the receptions which usually preceded the dinner, so that we sometimes had to limit them to only the people that came to the dinners.

We always tried to make the candidate available. Now, for instance, when Adlai spoke at the Veteran's Auditorium in San Francisco, I don't believe there was any charge. At the Hollywood Bowl, I think there were reserved seats where there was a charge, but not the rest. When I was chairman of United Nations Day in San Francisco for the United Nations sixteenth anniversary, I was successful in getting Adlai as our speaker, and reserved "sponsor seats" downstairs at \$100 as well as reserved \$15 and \$10 seats. So, you develop all kinds of procedures and schemes. We wanted the meeting available for all income brackets. We made net proceeds of almost \$10,000 for the United Nations Organization.

We tried, especially in 1952, to make Adlai Stevenson available at meetings where people could come. But he was pulled and yanked and pushed around so much. Sometimes I had to put my arms around the waist of one of the people in front of me to hang onto so as not to be knocked off my feet when I was following Adlai into or out of the meeting room. These mob scenes can be dangerous.

But we did our best to open meetings to the public and we always wished we had money for more television programs. Because that is where Adlai was magnificent.

Chall: That's when the first use of major television came in. I guess it was that year, wasn't it?

Shirpser: I think so.

Chall: And the cost became apparent.

Shirpser: Yes. But, he was on major television several times. Not enough, of course. Eisenhower probably had three programs to every one of ours until they seemed to realize that he wasn't effective on television. Then I think they cut down on the number they had intended to have.

Remember, Ike's exuberant personality, and he was very warm and outgoing. I think he did better in meeting people and Adlai did better on television.

After the Campaign

Chall: What did you do after the campaign for a short time before you started getting more letters from Mr. Mitchell? Did you rest somehow?

Shirpser: I can't remember that I had a real rest. I know after my own campaign I just disappeared for a week. But, I think this time I probably just had a weekend someplace because there was so much to do, and to clean up the campaign affairs in my office.

I found that I had used up all the money that friends had donated. Sometimes my monthly telephone bills to Washington was as much as \$200, because it meant calling back and forth to seek speakers, find out who was coming, what plane he was going to take, where to meet him, get his acceptance of a rigorous schedule. There were constant calls back and forth; it was the only way I could finalize arrangements and try to get speakers when and where they were wanted. Sometimes I would have to make four or five calls. The chairman of the National Committee Speakers Bureau might be on tour and his secretary couldn't say, so I would ask permission to go over her head to the person I wanted, and if he couldn't do it, he'd suggest somebody else. This meant call after call. It was much more expensive then to call Washington or their home states, wherever I could find them.

Moving and Staffing the Office

Shirpser: We had another meeting of my friends who had formed this committee and again they were very generous and contributed. But I realized I couldn't go on spending at the rate I was going. After the campaign ended, I didn't have anyone to take Miller's office or to share the cost of the waiting room with me. I wanted to stay in the Balboa Building where the national committeewoman's office had been for many years. I went down the hall on the same floor and found a little empty office looking out on a light well. It was dark, small, very depressing. It was only \$50 a month, so I took it, because it still gave me a place from which to operate, in the same office building.

My volunteers and I painted the office a nice cheery yellow color. We put drapes on the window and I put my autographed pictures from the campaign all around the walls. I usually brought some flowers from home. I did my best to make it less grim. I am rather a feminine sort of person. I like something of beauty around me and I love flowers. It's one of my real interests.

Then I organized a group of daily volunteers, because I couldn't afford a secretary. We had a daily log book, which was a classic. I wish I had kept it. They would spell each other and they would write down who called and what they said, and they would write funny things and amusing incidents. They would interpolate what they said or what they thought. Sometimes I was lucky enough to have the same volunteer all day. Most of the time it was someone in the morning, then a lunch recess, and then somebody else in the afternoon.

A few could type, most of them couldn't. I usually had to send out letters to a public stenographer. I don't type well. If my volunteer couldn't come it was her responsibility to find somebody else. Usually they did, and if somebody new would come to the office and wouldn't know the procedures and necessary information, really all they could do was to be an answering service. It was a terribly difficult way to operate, but I was there almost every day, except the days I was out organizing.

Organizing Democratic Clubs

Shirpser: Within a week from the time the campaign ended I must have received a hundred letters, everyone protesting the fact that there was so little organization in the Democratic party, saying they had looked in the phone book and couldn't find a single Democratic listing. When they had found campaign headquarters and had gone there and offered to work, nobody ever called them again. They had gone back again and listed their names and again no one had ever called them.

Chall: The State Central Committee office?

Shirpser: And the County Central Committee offices and the campaign headquarters. Remember many were new people. They were all working under pressure. They all had little time to develop anything beyond the necessities. Those who wanted to help and were not given responsibilities, naturally were frustrated. They said, "What do you have to do to force your way into the Democratic party? Do you have to hammer down doors?"

Well, this was the general gist of what I received in these letters. I told George Miller that I wanted to see him and talk to him about it and that I was going to answer their requests to help them organize. He had received letters too. He said, "Don't waste your time and money. Right after the campaign everybody is angry and frustrated. They'll all fold up." I said, "I have some definite invitations to go into some areas and try to organize." He said, "All I can tell you is you'll just wear yourself out in the effort and it won't amount to a damned thing."

I just couldn't accept this. I knew that I had accomplished a good deal out in the areas during the campaign. National committeewomen generally haven't done this in the past. Mrs. Heller usually stayed in her office and brought people to her, and she hated to make speeches. I don't know that I mentioned that. She got nervous when she had to talk publicly. I never heard her make a speech, even in the following years when she often did take some active role, and in campaigning, particularly for Adlai. I don't remember that she did more than introduce someone publicly. I'm not criticizing her, I'm just saying that it was an ordeal for her, so she usually didn't go out into the areas and speak at meetings. She was on the phone a great deal.

Shirpser: So this was something new to people outside of the cities, to have a national committeewoman willing to come and help them, and stay overnight if need be. I often stayed in some people's homes, which I didn't like to do, because you have to adjust to their way of life and with little privacy. But the expense was so great that when I was invited and it was someone I knew, I did accept and often stayed with friends in different areas around the state.

I think at the end of a couple of months I may have had twenty clubs organized. One of the first calls I got was from Alan Cranston who was a businessman, and he lived in Los Altos. He had been deeply devoted to Adlai. He said, 'We've got to do something, Clara. I've heard you, and I've watched you, and I think you can be the one to help us. If I get a large group together, we'll have a buffet supper at my sister's home which is larger than mine (Eleanor Fowle, who later became the state chairwoman of the Women's Division of the Democratic party). We'll have as many as we can get together there, if you will come down and talk to us on the issues and tell us how we should organize. I think we should form a Democratic Club in Los Altos, which is chiefly Republican. But, I know enough Democrats that would join, I think.'

That was one of my first engagements and I didn't know Alan well then. As I got to know him, I realized how able he was and what a fine person he was in every way, and so was his wife, Geneva. I got to know Eleanor and John Fowle, too. I think Alan had thirty people there, and they gave me a really intensive questioning period. This is valuable. This is where you can get converts. I spoke briefly, and I wanted them to question me. By the time I had left they had promised they would form a Democratic group. And it got to be one of our best groups, with Alan as president. That was his first political office.

Later, I called Alan and said what I was doing in other areas and asked him if he thought any other groups in the adjacent areas could be organized. He did get several clubs started. He was delighted to do it. This became the District Club organization.

I also went to Southern California and urged Liz Snyder to do this. I think she was Southern California chairman of the Women's Division. You know, we always worked very closely together. We're still good friends.

Shirpser: There were a couple of very powerful women's groups in Beverly Hills. I asked them to expand, and bring in new members from each area of Beverly Hills. I remember traveling around at my own expense, and Ad drove me whenever possible. Sometimes we'd make a weekend of it. If we were going someplace where there was a resort nearby, we'd go on a Friday and then we'd spend the weekend there. I could get some rest and we could get some enjoyment out of it, too. Often, Ad could do some business along the way.

For instance, when we went down to Carmel, Monterey, and Pacific Grove, that was Ad's business territory. So, we'd usually try to go on a Friday and then we'd spend the weekend someplace in the area. This was one of our favorite areas and I was always glad to be asked to speak there--and to organize clubs.

VII ORGANIZING THE COUNCIL OF DEMOCRATIC CLUBS, 1953
(Interview 8, January 26, 1973)

"What's Wrong with the Democratic Party?"

Chall: Today I thought we would talk about the organization of the CDC--the formation, the activities, the people. I think we left off last week with the fact that there were many Democratic Clubs forming after the election.

Shirpser: Not forming, they were formed. [Laughter] They wrote to me and said, "Come and help us organize," and I went.

Chall: Did they call these Democratic Clubs or Stevenson Clubs--were they different?

Shirpser: Well, I think they were organized chiefly because of their terrible sense of frustration after Adlai lost. They wanted to build their clubs in his image, you know, the idea of talking sense to the people. But, they were called Democratic Clubs. During the campaign they were called Stevenson Clubs.

At first there were mostly womens clubs that I went to organize. But, later, they asked me to come to evening meetings too, where there were men and women. I think I told you last time that George Miller said that I was wasting my money and time and they would fold up in a couple of months. Well, they didn't fold up.

George didn't have the time to go out into the field and organize, as I did. But, when he saw that the clubs were working and that they were expanding, then he had the sense to pick up the ball and carry it from there. He called me and said that he wanted to talk to me about it. So, I came to his office or he came to mine, and we discussed this at some length,

Shirpser: and I explained to him the reasons I was doing this and how enthusiastic I was about the response I was getting.

So, he said, "What do you think about calling a statewide conference? Maybe at Asilomar, which is inexpensive and a good central place to meet." I said, "I think it would be a great idea!" He said, "From what you've been saying to me I think a good title would be 'What's Wrong with the Democratic Party?'" I said, "I think that's a very provocative title, we should explore what is wrong and then after that, let's do something about it to make it right."

I turned over all my lists to him--all the presidents and other officers of the clubs, and told him whom to contact. He said he would like me to sign the letter of invitation with him. I suggested that John Anson Ford should sign it, too. I don't know whether John was actually working in the South along the same lines I was, but I did go to Southern California several times, and I always told him when I was coming and always told him where I was going to speak and sometimes he joined me and we went to the different clubs together.

When all these letters went out I sent out a press release announcing the conference at Asilomar, and the details.

Chall: These are the letters to come to Asilomar?

Shirpser: Yes. This was sent out on January 28, 1953. So, I imagine that the Asilomar conference was in early February. And in this press release I urged all Democrats to attend the Statewide Democratic Conference at Asilomar stressing that it was open to all Democrats.

Chall: Yes, I wondered how people were chosen. Anybody could come?

Shirpser: Anybody could come. Now, you see, the County Central Committee members are elected. The State Central Committee appoints the congressional district co-chairman. So, this is already part of the organization. This new organization of clubs was to get everybody working and actively participating.

In the press release, I said, "The many new Democratic clubs which have been founded in the last couple of months since the defeat of Adlai Stevenson, and the increasing membership of existing organizations show the fine constructive spirit of Democrats in meeting the challenge of that November defeat. At

Shirpser: Asilomar we want all Democrats who are interested, not only party officials, to enter into the planning for a revitalized Democratic party to safeguard the gains made under twenty years of former Democratic administrations, to cooperate with the new administration where the policy is in the public interest; to be ready, alert, and informed, and to give constructive criticism when needed. This is not the time to dwell only on the great accomplishments of the past. The strength and vitality of the Democratic party will be measured in our realization of the need for further progress in the future." Then I mentioned that John Anson Ford would address the conference as would George Miller and I.

I set up a special women's meeting at noon at the conference with the Northern vice-chairman of the Women's Division, Patricia Mooser, and Elizabeth Snyder who was the vice-chairman of the Women's Division of Southern California.

Then I also asked to be our guests and to speak to us that day at the Democratic women's meeting, two newly elected Democratic women members of the California state assembly, Miss Dorothy Donahoe of Bakersfield and Mrs. Pauline Davis of Portola. This press release gave us good publicity on the Asilomar conference.

Chall: I imagine it would have. But, George Miller took care of the arrangements, writing to the club presidents and all of that?

Assessing the Need for the Democratic Clubs

Shirpser: Yes. I signed the letter of invitation with him, and so did John Anson Ford.

Chall: I am assuming then that this was done with the blessing of the State Democratic Central Committee.

Shirpser: Without their blessing, in many cases.

Chall: No? George Miller was doing this on his own?

Shirpser: The clubs were considered a great threat by many of the county committees.

Chall: At that time?

Shirpser: Yes.

Chall: Even at that early stage of bringing them together?

Shirpser: Yes. They saw this as usurpation of their political responsibilities and power. I fought the clubs' battle in state executive committees and State Central Committee. They were sort of "my baby." I started many of the groups and I saw these as the only answer to building a better Democratic party.

I think I told you this realization probably wouldn't have been so strong if I hadn't campaigned, in 1950, for the state assembly, when the county committee didn't meet once during the whole primary election. I had to start from scratch to organize my own campaign. Somebody said long ago, I don't know who it was, that "elections are won between campaigns." This is true. When the campaign comes, if you're not ready to go, if you're not organized, you certainly have a very ineffective campaign. If you have a whole reservoir of strength ready to be drawn upon, then you can accomplish a great deal.

Some of our incumbent congressmen didn't like the new club movement. I don't think Elizabeth Snyder was enthusiastic about them, but she did cooperate.

Another reason why it was necessary to have this organization of clubs was, we still had cross-filing and the county committees could not endorse candidates. Here we have candidates starting out, everybody urging them to run, and then finding they are way out there someplace, with nobody to call on.

One of the things we did immediately was to set up district councils of clubs, to set up a district pre-primary convention which would hear the candidates and endorse the one they chose. I urged them to have long question periods. Almost anyone can write a good speech, or get somebody to write it for him, and practice it and deliver it well. But, the mettle of the candidate is tested by the question period. If the candidate is questioned, then you could judge the man or woman; their information and ability are demonstrated.

After the club movement was organized, there was always a contest for the endorsement. I think that was one of the most valuable things we did. Then, the state convention of clubs later would nominate statewide officers, and accept the recommendations of the district councils for congressmen, for state senators, and for assemblymen, and so on.

Chall: That was the expectation.

Shirpser: There was one outstanding example in Fresno of a county committee chairman, Lionel Steinberg, who worked with the clubs from the beginning, recognized their value. Later when Bernie Sisk decided to run for Congress, he was unknown. He started from scratch to run against the incumbent--I think it was Oakley Hunter--who was congressman and well established, very conservative. Because Lionel worked with the clubs as well as with the county committee members, almost a miracle was performed and Bernie Sisk won the primary and then the general election. I remember asking Estes Kefauver to come to Fresno in Bernie's campaign, which was the nucleus for a big and successful dinner. Bernie was probably the only congressman, as I remember, who stayed with Estes in 1956.

Chall: So, even from the beginning then George Miller was doing this alone and without the blessing--even though he was the chairman of the state committee.

Shirpser: No, I wouldn't say alone. Lots of county chairmen and committee members came, and wanted to see what was happening. They had to protect themselves, you know, so they were there. Many congressional district co-chairmen (it is always a man and a woman for each congressional district) came. Many of them recognized the need. But, I think the older people who were well established and had a good deal of influence and power did not like the idea of these people contesting with them.

But, they came to realize later that if they didn't join them they would have to fight them. After the clubs were formed, the County Central Committees met regularly and the club members ran for the County Central Committees, and they often were elected. Then the state party officials, although this was an unofficial party organization, always came as delegates to the state conventions. They almost had to do so.

At this point George and I worked together quite harmoniously. He needed me. I think that helped our relationship. I was delighted that he recognized the value of the club movement. We agreed completely on the importance of it. This was really one of the first times after I became national committeewoman that we really worked with harmony and some friendship, and I had hoped very much that this would augur well for the future. Famous last words!

Chall: Who else worked with you on this initial call to Asilomar?

Shirpser: Alan Cranston did. You see, by then he had formed--

Chall: His own club.

Shirpser: Not only his own club, but he encouraged all the other groups in his area, Santa Clara County and San Jose, and he became, naturally, the first president of the district council of clubs. So, he probably had the best organization in the state with which to start.

I had told George of this and I'm sure he knew Alan by then. Alan played quite a role in the Asilomar conference, too. So did John Anson Ford in the South because he had certainly approved of the whole idea. There was a good deal of unity and harmony among us. I think this got off to a good start.

Chall: In a sense then, you were Kefauver people to begin with.

Shirpser: Yes.

Chall: You were sort of renegades from the basic old political structure to being with, even though you had all worked with Adlai Stevenson?

Shirpser: No, I don't like the word renegade. [Laughter] We saw the need for party reform and in Estes we found the man who would break down some of those barriers. I think, though, through Estes' efforts, the way he campaigned for Adlai, and the way he spoke for him, that most of the Kefauver people were thoroughly resolved to help Adlai. I can't say all of them. Naturally, there were some holdouts. But, I think a large majority of them certainly were supporting Stevenson and realized what a great man he was. They too felt a tremendous sense of defeat when he lost so badly. I think he only won nine southern states.

Chall: What I was really getting at was the fact that the impetus for the clubs, while it came out of the Stevenson campaign and his personality, still seemed to have been carried here by the original Kefauver people.

Shirpser: That's true. I think Alan might have been on the Stevenson slate. I know he wasn't on ours. But, he was the first person, I think, or one of the first who turned to me and said, "We need to do something. Will you help me?"

Shirpser: I think the Stevenson people really knew how hard I was working for them. There was no longer this schism that I was for Kefauver and they were for Stevenson. They knew I was for Stevenson, too. Certainly everything Adlai said during and after the campaign would indicate that he was really grateful for my loyalty and help.

The Democrats Meet at Asilomar

Chall: All right. Now what did you do at the conference?

Shirpser: More than five hundred people came to Asilomar at their own expense from all over the state. Many of them were Democrats who had not actively participated in the past, some party officials such as county chairmen and congressional district chairmen, presidents and other officers of the new Democratic Clubs, and many of the formerly established Democratic Clubs, of which there were already some.

At Asilomar I think we first had a big general session. All of us spoke--George Miller, John Anson Ford, and I. Going over my papers I found something that pleased me, that I had really forgotten. When writing my speech for the Asilomar conference, I was thinking of the former Democratic presidents and I remembered FDR and the "New Deal." I remembered Harry Truman's, the "Fair Deal." And I tried to evaluate in my mind what the Eisenhower administration was doing, and I originated the phrase, which Adlai later used in many speeches, because I wrote him about the good reaction I received, naming the Eisenhower administration, "The Big Deal."

I went on to prove it, and I think it might be interesting to review. When I spoke of his administration as the "Big Deal" I didn't realize then how prophetic this phrase would become because there can be little doubt in the mind of any thinking American as to the philosophy and practice of that administration.

From my speech: "Think of the appointments to the cabinet: Eight millionaires and one plumber. And this labor official, Mr. Durkin, resigned less than a year later after vain attempts to get the president to keep his campaign promise of revising the Taft-Hartley Law. Now, Mr. Durkin has been replaced with

Shirpsers: a representative of big business, who is undoubtedly finding his associates in the cabinet far more congenial than Mr. Durkin did. As of this date the Taft-Hartley Law is still not revised.

"Then, there are the appointments to just below cabinet rank. Surely, rule one should be that national policy cannot be carried out by men who do not believe in the very programs which they head. Albert Cole, housing administrator, had been a foe of public housing. Here is a quote he made--"

Chall: You need not read anything into the record fully that you have papers on. Can you tell me what was it you were reading from?

Shirpsers: This was my speech.

Chall: This was your speech to the Asilomar convention?

Shirpsers: Yes. And just let me finish this. The quote from Albert Cole, new housing administrator, was that "The idea of public housing came from the Kremlin." This is the housing administrator! Down the line I have a whole list of new appointees by President Eisenhower if you want to insert them. This very much exemplifies that fact that this was the "Big Deal."

After the talks we had a question period. There were microphones around the hall. Anyone who wanted to speak lined up behind each mike. Many wanted to say what's wrong with the Democratic party. And they did at great length. George Miller was the chairman and he tried to hold them to questions and short statements, but it was pretty hard to do because everyone was bursting to say what was wrong.

Finally, Professor Peter Odegard, chairman of the political science department, University of California, who was one of my closest friends and was a tremendous help in getting the conference organized, got up and he said, "I've heard enough gripes. Now, let's talk about what's right with the Democratic party." He went on to make a brilliant analysis of the good things the Democratic party had done, and what was ahead for us if we organized and really worked at it.

And when he got through, I said, "I'd like to add something to this. I think what's good about the Democratic party right now is that over five hundred people have come here at their own expense to do something about it." Now, this was a real proof of the way people felt.

Shirpser: Then, we broke up into small committee groups. We were just exploring what our needs were, groups to consider voter registration drives, and precinct work, telephone committees, mailing pieces, campaign headquarters volunteers, poll watchers, absentee ballots, how to set up home meetings for candidates as well as large meetings in public places, and especially getting out the vote. Each person went to a committee meeting and they had a choice. If some got too crowded we asked them to be flexible and join another committee.

Then, the decision was made that we'd have a founding convention within a few months as quickly as it could be arranged, and perferably in Fresno which is halfway between Northern and Southern California.

We didn't speak much about fund raising then, as I remember it. We'll have to go into that later because the clubs were not very effective in that field. They were more of a working group than a fund-raising group. There were many young people, which pleased me. Those are our future leaders and if you get them active and participating, then you are building for the future too.

Background Organization for the CDC

Chall: Before we get to the founding convention, did you appoint people to work on the process of the organization of the founding convention?

Shirpser: Oh yes.

Chall: And do you recall who those people would have been?

Shirpser: No. But there was a book written on the CDC in which I wasn't even mentioned. Nobody interviewed me, so I don't think they did a very good job of research, do you? I don't think it was an official history. It was the author's account of the CDC.

Chall: That's well worth putting into the record. Did you work on that committee?

Shirpser: I worked with all of the CDC committees. There was a bylaws committee. We had to establish those. George asked me to serve on the Interim Planning Committee. I've forgotten which committee

Shirpsen: Alan headed. They had a good credentials committee. Although anyone could join, the amount of dues were discussed. I believe we started out with something like two dollars annually. Maybe just one dollar in some areas. The dues were completely minimal, so that anyone could join.

We wanted to encourage membership, some sort of an organization committee; whatever seemed appropriate, you know, to get started.

So I worked on all committees. The committee chairmen all asked me to come and meet with them. They would phone mostly and ask questions, because they were scattered all over the state.

Really, I must reiterate here, I had an important role in getting the club movement started. It was a source of great satisfaction to me. To me this objective was what I was working for, and as I look back and see how many others were given credit for starting the clubs, for organizing them, for fighting their battles (and they were often big battles to overcome the opposition of the regular party group), maybe I should have had more self interest. But I was glad that George wanted to lead the club movement, after the initial organizing, because he was the state chairman of the California Democratic party.

I know I had a lot of influence with the clubs. I went to their board meetings; I don't remember whether I was a member of their board of directors or just an honorary member. Anytime I felt that anything was important they always allotted time to me and they listened to me.

Chall: Could you tell, at that time, that people were angling for position, feeling that this was going to be an important element in the Democratic politics, and that they wanted position and credit?

Shirpsen: I can't really evaluate that. It was so early and the leadership develops as you go along. We asked qualified people--for instance, attorneys were to help with writing the bylaws; people who were oriented toward issues like Peter Odegard to help with setting policy. We tried to get the best people we could find up and down the state. George did consult with me on this, and I did give him ideas because I had worked hard during the campaign and I knew many people in different areas of California.

Shirpser: I think they were doing this with the best will and motives.

Chall: It was later, then, that they assumed credit? Because it had been successful?

Shirpser: Yes. Paul Ziffren spent time supporting the clubs later. He had many problems with the Democratic party officials, with the congressional delegation in his own district in Southern California which issued a bitter statement of protest about him.

Alan called me and we talked together about the presidency of the CDC. I saw in him the qualities we needed for the state-wide first president of the CDC. I suggested it to him and he was delighted. This is what he wanted to do. But, he wasn't well known up and down the state. I remember going to Northern California district conventions where I made sure he was invited and I spoke in his favor. But, the big problem was in Southern California. I don't remember who was contesting down there, but someone wanted to be president from the southern part of the state. That's where most of the votes are. But, I think we had more clubs in the north. So, the representation at the state convention was probably quite equal.

I did a lot of work in the south with people I knew well, like Liz Snyder, and with the clubs at which I spoke. I wrote letters and I spoke down there several times in the interval between January and November or December when the founding convention was--to help Alan's campaign for CDC presidency.

Chall: The founding convention was in December?

Shirpser: I think it was in November.

I have the speech that I gave at the time of the founding convention and I think that was the date when Senator "Scoop" Jackson was the one I asked to come and speak to us. The letter I've written to thank him is dated December 7. So, it probably was in November. That's as near as I can place it.

It took months to get organized and to do all these studies and to get started.

- Chall: I wondered how you could do it from spring to summer. So, it was in autumn of '53. Now, Alan Cranston, then, had indicated that he would like to be president?
- Shirpser: Yes.
- Chall: Somewhere, I don't recall now just where I think I saw this, I saw that Pat Brown had somebody he was interested in running as president.
- Shirpser: I don't remember. Alan and Pat always got along well. You know that Alan campaigned and won the state controller's office when Pat won the election as governor. I think they always had a good relationship.

The Founding Convention in Fresno

- Shirpser: I spoke at the founding convention and I was invited to go to all the different committee meetings where they were deciding which recommendations to make to the conference.

It was in Fresno, and if you want to insert my speech, I told them a good deal about a recent Chicago Democratic National conference where I spoke of what we were doing in California with the new club movement and received an excellent response. I said, that I promised the Democratic National Committee that we would do these things: build a strong, effective Democratic party encouraging as many people as possible to actively participate in Democratic politics; get the facts and the issues to the voters...

I haven't spoken yet of the Democratic Digest which came out about that time. I urged everyone at that founding convention to subscribe to it. Because this was the definitive statement of what the Democratic party was doing all over the nation. I later found out from John Horning, the managing editor of the Democratic Digest, that I sold more subscriptions to it than anyone else in the United States.

Clayton Fritchey was the editor. He had a close relationship to Adlai. Later, when Adlai was ambassador to the United Nations, Clayton Fritchey was his administrative assistant. I liked him. He was full of creative ideas and I worked well with

Shirpser: him. Now he's publishing a newspaper somewhere in New York state. He really made the Democratic Digest a good, informative publication. It's too bad they stopped publishing it.

Chall: That was also a money-raising thing, too, wasn't it?

Shirpser: Partly, but mostly its purpose was to get people to buy subscriptions to the Democratic Digest so they would be aware of what was happening in the Democratic party.

I found that I sold Adlai his first membership to the Democratic Digest. I also asked him to send a message to the founding convention which, of course, was an excellent one. I read it to the convention. I was very glad to have this to show Adlai's realization of how valuable the club movement would be.

Alan was an excellent president. He worked hard. He was friendly to everyone and always accessible. He was strong in his position on issues. He was liberal. I think he did a fine job. In fact, I have a letter here which I wrote to Adlai, in April 16, 1954, which is only a year and three months after the election, telling him that we had four hundred new Democratic clubs with a thirty-thousand membership. I think, perhaps, by the next year we had five hundred with fifty thousand members. So, the Democratic club movement kept growing.

I'd like to tell you about U.S. Senator "Scoop" Jackson-- Henry Jackson, from Washington, who was our speaker at the founding convention. I knew him first through Estes. Since the people I know best are the people who were close to Estes, Scoop was a very good friend. He was young, vigorous, articulate, and liberal. I knew he would appeal to this CDC group. I explained to Scoop the importance of this meeting and the nationwide publicity he was going to get, and he agreed to come.

At the founding convention the participants were estimated at 1,200 or more. I know there wasn't a reservation to be had within fifteen miles of Fresno because everybody was welcome to come.

Chall: How did you control the voting? Were there some with or without voting rights?

Shirpser: I think they had to become members to vote. The membership dues had to be paid and then they were members. Later, of course, we had delegates. But, for the founding convention there were so many groups wanting to get organized that it seemed to me that anyone who wanted to come and join was welcome to come.

Chall: But they could become members at the time of the convention.

Shirpser: Yes, there were tables in the lobby of the convention hall with membership blanks.

Senator Jackson was the featured speaker at the dinner, and he was at the head table. They scheduled too many speakers ahead of him. I had seen his excellent speech, and issue by issue was taken away from him by each speaker, who would speak on water and power problems, and the TVA, on civil rights. By the time they got to him, he practically tossed his speech away and said, "Everything I've written has been taken care of, so let me just talk to you about the importance of what you're doing." By that time the speeches had gone on far too long, and everyone was so tired that they couldn't really concentrate on his speech as well as his speech merited.

I wasn't chairman; I never would have allowed that program to be so long and with no control of the time previous speakers took. It isn't fair to a national figure to put him at the end of a long, tiring program. But, he was an awfully good sport about it. I think he created a tremendously good impression on everyone there, by his ability as a speaker, his sense of humor, and his sincerity. I told him how sorry I was that the dinner had not been handled in the way I had planned it with the chairman.

I'd like to talk to you about Blair Moody next, I think, because we have talked a lot about serious things and I enjoy talking about something that was fun. He was a United States senator when I first met him.

On the Club Circuit with Blair Moody

Chall: You want to talk about Blair Moody at this founding convention?

Shirpser: No, this goes back to an earlier time in 1953. One of the ways I founded new clubs and larger organizations was to bring out national speakers to meetings in various areas. California is so far from Washington, and Californians often don't know these national people, who are great drawing cards.

Blair had wonderful coverage, nationally, on the Loyalty Oath Committee of which he was chairman at the 1952 convention. He was on television and was interviewed many times as he went from one caucus to another, and to the different delegations. He'd made a fine speech from the platform. Blair is one of the handsomest men I ever saw. There's a clipping here that says that he was "the handsomest young senator who came to Washington since James Stewart came as Mr. Smith Goes to Washington." [Laughter] I thought this reference to his good looks was appropriate.

He was a very volatile person, quick, and full of fun, young, a good speaker. Of course, he was excellent in question periods because he'd been a newspaperman and television moderator. This was his background. He had originated the program "Meet Your Congress," which used to be on TV weekly, from Washington. Later I was able to arrange for it to come to the coast. He asked me if I could work on it and through people I knew in television, I was able to get it out here locally which was excellent for us because it was like "Washington Week," now on Channel Nine. He always had guests and explored the issues. He was excellent as the moderator.

I called Blair in Washington, D.C. I had worked with him on the loyalty oath at the convention and I had the opportunity there to know him well. In early 1953 I told him what I was doing about founding new Democratic clubs and that we needed some national speakers of prominence to get meetings together. Not just women's groups, which I had been doing mostly up to that time, but larger groups of both women and men. I had a whole schedule worked out for him.

He said, "Wait a minute, Clara. You know, California is a jungle. We don't dare come to California. We're eaten alive." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "In the past when I've come

Shirpser: to California, I've been torn apart. If I came under one person's auspices, then other Democrats become my enemies. I want to help you, but I just don't think I can."

I said, "Well, I think this is most unfair. I'm surprised at you. After all, I'm just getting started and I need your help. Why don't you just take a chance that you won't be torn apart and give me the opportunity to show you what I can do. I think you'll probably go back to Washington and say it's safe to come to California, now. You might even enjoy it."

So, he said, "Okay. I can't say no to you." I said, "If you don't do it I'm going to tell Estes to call you for me." Blair said, "I'll be glad to come."

He did make arrangements to come and Ad and I met him at the airport. I took him down the peninsula, all the way to Monterey. We had a breakfast meeting perhaps, in San Mateo. I remember we had a lunch meeting in San Jose. I'll tell you about that later. We had dinner in Monterey, and we all stayed overnight there. Then we went back to Stockton because they had been very anxious to have him there. I know we stopped en route some other place, too, for a meeting. So, we had at least six meetings in two days built around him.

After we were leaving San Jose where there was a very good turnout, Blair was quite impressed with the enthusiasm of the Democrats. On the way to Monterey, Blair turned to me and he said very seriously, "I'm going to ask you a question and I want you to tell me the truth." I said, "Well, of course." He said, "Did you ever eat such a lousy lunch in all your life?" And I said, "No." He said, "I'm hungry. I know we're late, but we've got to stop off someplace and get something to eat. I can't take a day like this unless I get some decent food."

We passed a creamery that said "lunch" and we stopped and went in there. It was near a high school and there was a crowd of high school kids in there. We sat down at the counter. Ad was looking at the menu and he said, "You know, when I was young I always wanted to have a banana split and I never could afford it." Blair said, "Haven't you had one since?" Ad said, "No. They're too fattening and they don't tempt me now." Blair called the waitress and said, "Three banana splits." They were about a foot long and had scoop after scoop of ice cream on them, and syrup, and nuts, and bananas. All those kids stared at us; you know, they were drinking cokes or eating ice cream

Shirpser: cones, and here were three mature people loading up on all this rich stuff. We ate every bite of it, too!

Ad finally got his banana split and enjoyed it! [Laughter] We got to Monterey and, of course, we were late. We were always late, no matter how I tried to be punctual. The chairman was walking up and down in the hotel lobby, obviously upset. He said, "You're terribly late. People are getting impatient. You won't have time for a shower or change. I've registered you. You'll have to go right into our dinner meeting. Now, relax. Don't get upset." In the meantime he was biting his fingernails in frustration and worry.

So, all of us starting laughing. We did long to clean up and put on fresh clothes, but we didn't have time, so we went right in and the meeting worked out fine.

We got back to Monterey after the meeting where the three of us were staying in a motel. Blair said, "You know, Ike held a press conference today." Let's go down to the newspaper office. It probably won't come out until twelve o'clock. Will you stay up that long and read it?" I said, "Surely, if you want to." We got the first paper that came off the press.

Blair had a funny habit that is true of many newspaper people. When he was doing anything connected with newspapers, including typing, he put on his hat. He couldn't type without his hat on, and he couldn't read a newspaper article and really concentrate without it. (Later, when I visited the Moody home in Washington, D.C., and Blair had to type an article before driving me back to my hotel; he put on his hat even though he was typing in his library at home.)

Blair was an experienced newspaperman. He frowned as he read the newspaper and he read one paragraph twice. Then he said, "I want to read this to you." I don't know whether you remember, but President Eisenhower often had several subjects in one long involved sentence. He'd start with one subject and end with another and something else in the middle. So, Blair read us Ike's answer to a reporter's question. Ike's reply was about two paragraphs long, all one sentence. I said, "Read it again." He read it again, and then he took off his hat and his glasses and he said, "What the hell is he talking about?" That was his reaction as an experienced newspaperman. I think that's why Ike had so few press conferences. President Nixon probably has given fewer because he doesn't want to answer questions.

Shirpser: But, Ike tried to answer them, though this was a field in which he was not proficient. His press conferences really were quite a debacle, I think.

Then we drove to this dinner in Stockton. Blair told us that he had to make a plane that same night, leaving about ten p.m. from the San Francisco airport. He said, "I'm depending on you to see that I get it, Clara." So, I phoned the chairman immediately and explained Blair's need to catch this early plane. I said, "You'll have to get Blair's speech on time. Please don't let a lot of people speak before Blair does. Get him speaking on time. He's made an excellent speech in Monterey; I have to get him out of there at eight-thirty at the latest, no matter what. Blair has an important appointment in Washington, D.C. and has to travel overnight on the plane and he's got to make the ten o'clock plane."

I impressed this on Blair, too. "Don't talk too long now." We knew each other well by then, so I didn't have to talk to him as a VIP, but as a friend.

In Stockton we had a cocktail hour, as we always do, preceding the dinner. Everyone wanted to meet him and talk to him. We came to dinner; it was later than planned, as usual. I went up to the chairman and said, "If you don't put Blair on now, he won't be able to speak." So the chairman changed the program and introduced Blair. Blair became enamoured with the sound of his own voice and he kept talking. It was getting later and later and he was the one who had to make that plane. I was in a frenzy. Ad sent a note up to me that said, "If we don't leave now we're going to miss the plane." I was sitting next to Blair, and the only thing I could do was to reach over to him and yank at his trousers to get his attention. He looked down at me and I said, "We've got to go. Stop talking."

He said, "I've been informed by Clara that I've got to leave now or we'll miss our plane. But, there's just one more thing I want to tell you..." and he kept talking. So, I pulled at his trousers again. When we got in the car he said to Ad, "Do you know your wife almost yanked my trousers off?" On the way out of the hall where the dinner meeting was held, everyone wanted to talk to him. In the meantime Ad had gone out and phoned the

Shirpser: airport and said that we had Senator Blair Moody and that we had trouble with the car or something, and please hold the plane if we're not at the airport on time.

We drove at a mad pace all the way down. Ad and I were absolute wrecks. Blair was calm. He was the one who had to catch the plane. He was the one who had delayed us by talking too much. And he was chatting, and he was relaxed. I guess he was more used to campaigning than I was! We did make his plane with seconds to spare. That was harrowing.

I always saw Blair after that whenever I was in Washington. I got to know him and his wife, Ruth, who was a very intelligent and charming person. They had two lovely children. I might as well finish Blair's story here. It's a very tragic one.

Blair was campaigning for reelection as United States senator early in the next year. He had an opponent who was a well-known labor official. The source of Blair's support had always been labor. Walter Reuther was one of his closest friends. I think Soapy Williams was governor in Michigan at that time. He was strongly helping Blair. But, Blair was working terribly hard and he caught a cold. Instead of doing the sensible thing and stop campaigning, he kept on his rigorous schedule in stormy weather and he caught pneumonia. I sent a wire and his secretary wrote me and said she knew I was one of Blair's closest friends, and I would be glad to know that he was getting along just fine. His pulse and fever were down and everything else was normal. Less than twenty-four hours later he was dead.

Chall: Is that so? In the middle of the campaign.

Shirpser: He was so young and vital, had so much to give. It was a terrible tragedy. He had spent and pledged a lot of money in the campaign. He knew he was going to win. It was inevitable that he would. I think he put a second mortgage on his home. So, he died in debt, leaving Ruth and those two children with their home mortgaged and debts. I was deeply saddened by his tragic death.

While Blair was here, to my surprise he turned out to be a good friend of William Knowland. He called Bill Knowland from my home, and told him some nice things about me. They were diametrically opposed in policy matters and on issues, but they had been good friends in Washington. Bill Knowland did a very good thing. He helped to get Ruth a position in Washington, a good paying and an interesting position. It was hard on her being

Shirpsr: away from the children; they were still quite young at that stage. She did a good job in whatever field it was. It had something to do with public relations. She was well qualified.

A couple of years later when I went to Washington and visited her, I was shocked at the change in her. You know, it's a very tough adjustment to go from being the wife of a brilliant and popular United States senator with all the prerogatives, and privileges, and parties that are part of Senate life in Washington, D.C., to being a widow who has to work. They had had a lovely home and two cars.

After Henry Grady died, Lucretia Grady decided to live in Washington, D.C. where she had been one of the most widely entertained visitors, and also a former resident. While her devoted friends were attentive to her, she found living there as a widow an unhappy experience, and she came back to California. She was one of my dearest friends, and we always maintained a close and devoted friendship.

Ruth Moody evidently couldn't adjust to the new scheme of life, and she finally died under mysterious circumstances. No one ever knew the real facts. It was such a tragedy. I felt so deeply sorry for those children. Blair had been married before. He had a son who was married and living in Michigan, I think, and he made a home for Blair's two young sons. They were two handsome, bright, loveable kids. So the children had a good home with their older stepbrother and his wife.

Perhaps, the next thing we ought to talk about is John Anson Ford's resignation.

Chall: Well, I'm not ready for that. I want to talk to you more about the CDC.

Shirpsr: All right.

The Membership of the CDC

Chall: I have some information from one of the books on California politics about that founding convention, and I wanted to get your opinions on it. Was there a strong feeling that the left-wing was going to take over the CDC at that point? Do you recall John Despol and his speech suggesting this concern?*

*Gladwin Hill, Dancing Bear: An Inside Look at California Politics (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1968), pp. 140-141.

Shirpser: I know him well. He's a very good labor leader and official.

Chall: Did he make a speech in which he intended to indicate that the radicals had better not take over the CDC? Do you recall this kind of thing?

Shirpser: I don't remember. There was always that worry. Later I do think the CDC made the mistake of taking on too many national issues, and they endorsed presidential candidates. They were not organized to do that but to work on the local, regional, and state levels. The membership was open to anyone, and there is always the possibility that some radicals will come in.

But, I've always felt democracy is strong enough that, if you practice it, you don't have to worry about Communists. We never asked anyone what his political philosophy was. If they were registered Democrats and they wanted to be a member of the clubs, we felt the club movement should be big enough to encompass all types of thought. Under Alan Cranston, I'm sure that it was not a leftist organization. It was a liberal organization.

Chall: But liberals in those days could have been called leftists and Communists by some people.

Shirpser: They often were.

Chall: And I was wondering whether what I had come across regarding John Despol's speech was an indication that either there were radicals coming in at the beginning, or that he was confusing liberal and radical?

Shirpser: Well, he may have feared the takeover of the clubs by radicals. I have no doubt that there were some radical people. There would inevitably be. But, I would assume that they were a small minority.

We also encouraged, and I've never spoken of this and I should have, many people from minority groups to join us. Up to then they hadn't had much voice in the Democratic party. Whenever we could we worked at bringing them into the membership. That philosophy was certainly part of the CDC movement.

Chall: What I should do then, at some other time, is just to send you the quote that I found in one of the books because it may be something that you would want to correct. It may not be quite correct, itself, you see.

Shirpser: All right. This ties in with something in my letter to Scoop Jackson. I said to him that some kind of an anti-communist resolution had been introduced and we had tabled it, and the press were going to play it up. Scoop arrived just at the right time when these questions were going on, and they started questioning him instead, and the press stopped playing up the anti-communist resolution. I'm quite sure that anti-communist resolution stayed tabled. Because this was not what the Democratic Council of Clubs was set up to do.

It was to nominate and endorse candidates and work in their campaigns to get them elected. It was to work on the issues, especially those that affected California. It was to build the Democratic party in California--increase membership and active participation. I think the Democratic Clubs should fill the function they were organized to do and which they did so well for a period of years, a true reservoir of strength, especially at the local level.

I think Joe Wyatt was the president after Alan, and he was excellent too. He had such a clever, off-beat, sense of humor. He always made meetings enjoyable.

Chall: The CDC was considered to be made up--at least at the beginning, and maybe still is--of educated middle-class, idealistic, men and women, bound together, as Ziffren put it, "by ideology rather than the opportunity for patronage."

Shirpser: They had no patronage to give. I don't know how they could have.

Chall: Did you see some of them wanting rewards, that is, an office? Or were most of them really concerned with issues, and trying to get the best candidates to respond to the issues and be elected?

Shirpser: I would differ about the majority being intelligent middle-class. There were many, many young people in the low income bracket.

Chall: Were they college educated?

Shirpser: Yes. I would say that the majority of them were, but our efforts were to bring in everybody.

Chall: But, how successful were they? Because most people who write about the CDC place the membership in this category. And educated--that probably means college education. Middle-class

Chall: and upper middle-class, and idealistic--concerned with issues. And the general feeling that I get, the assumption is that they really weren't blue-collar workers, laborers; even the minorities were never really part of the active CDC group, meaning by that the officials in the CDC. I was interested to know what you felt about the membership?

Shirpser: I think it was a broad cross section of the people of California. There were young people, and students were there, and many people who had low-paying salaries as well as upper-middle-income people. The clubs never were effective in raising funds, so this would contradict the upper-middle-income class definition of them. That they were well educated, I would accept completely. That they were mostly middle-class and upper middle-class, I think is not valid if you're talking about the majority. Certainly there were many who were. I think they were idealistic. I think they were issue oriented. But in the beginning this was a group outside of the regular party organization. There were many younger people. They were often Stevenson people and Kefauver people.

I would assume from the minimal dues that we could collect (I think the dues were flexible, \$1 to \$5 annually) this was not an upper middle-income-bracket group. Some of the people who came to these conventions even told me that they slept in their cars to save hotel bills when the weather wasn't bad. The clubs tried to raise enough money to pay the delegate's hotel bills, but they came even if this wasn't possible. They'd pool their cars. I keep thinking of young people when I think of the CDC. More and more young people came in and more minority people, too.

We had to work to make the minority groups understand that we really wanted them. Of course, there was never any segregation. Sometimes you find in club movements there will be a group that has all Negro members. We never wanted that. It was an integrating process. I would take issue with that upper-middle-income definition of the club membership. In my opinion it was a broad cross section of California Democrats.

Chall: How about laborers and blue-collar workers?

Shirpser: I know we had a lot of people from labor organizations, and some farm workers, too. In the beginning they were a little fearful of the club movement. Some officials thought it might be a threat to them. But as they realized what we were doing and why we were doing it, I know that a lot of people from labor

Shirpser: organizations belonged, particularly in the Fresno area in the center of the state, in which we met.

I disagree, definitely, with that definition. The value to me was that it was a cross section of the Democratic party.

Chall: How successful were you in getting minorities, particularly, blacks into the CDC? Were they fairly well represented?

Shirpser: Not in the beginning. But, as the club movement grew and more clubs were established, more and more came in. Around the Bay Area we had many Negro members. One women's club had a Negro president. I know in the areas where there are farm laborers, where there are many Negroes, they joined, too. I know Lionel worked at this as Fresno county chairman.

We were anxious to broaden the base of the Democratic party. After all, this is the basic theory of the Democratic party; it's not a special-interest party. It's a party of the people, and you had to get the people participating, and you had to work at it.

Of course, it depends completely on the leadership of the area. Later, the CDC became "far out" in the opinion of many of the older and more-established people and the membership has decreased. I think we got as high as fifty thousand, and I would assume today that membership is far less.

Chall: Can you say something about the role of women as you knew it in the CDC, not in the Democratic party necessarily, but the CDC? They always were hard workers and a great part of the volunteer core.

Shirpser: Yes.

Chall: But, were any of them groomed for office? Were they encouraged to run, as many other candidates were by CDC?

Shirpser: I'm not sure that the CDC actually encouraged candidates to run. We urged the best-qualified people to run. But, those decisions were made in the districts. The CDC as a state organization didn't have any part of the district convention, and the recommendations from the districts were always accepted at the state level as far as I remember, so there was no problem there.

Chall: What about at the district level?

Shirpser: I've spoken of calling a women's meeting to honor two newly elected assemblywomen at Asilomar. I'm sure that the Democratic Club members in Bakersfield had a lot to do with getting Dorothy Donahoe elected. She had had a lot of business experience, too. She belonged to Business and Professional Women, Zonta, etc. That background is very good for a woman candidate because she starts out with a base of support. I went to Bakersfield to campaign for her, bringing contributions for her, too.

I think that Pauline Davis got elected to the seat of her husband who had died. I don't remember the situation in Portola too well. There was a big conference in Chico, and I found among my papers here a very nice letter from Congressman Clair Engle from that district. He said, "I didn't get a chance to tell you at the Chico convention you did a great job. Keep up the good work..." So, there must have been people there from the northern part of the state, who campaigned for Pauline Davis.

Relationship to the Democratic Party

Chall: Now, I want to ask you some additional questions. We have touched on this and as we get into the campaigns of 1954 and 1956 we will probably draw out the meaning a little more fully. But, in the beginning was it anticipated that the CDC would be somewhat--not totally--but somewhat dependent of the regular party structure? Was that a consideration? Or was the consideration that it was bringing in new blood? Or was it both?

Shirpser: I think both, but chiefly the former.

Chall: Chiefly that it would be independent from the party's basic...

Shirpser: Yes, that they would work together, but this would be the place where people who wanted to actively participate would find a place and a welcome.

Chall: I see. Was there some kind of organized structure between the CDC and the central committee?

Shirpser: The only thing I can remember that each "infiltrated" the other. The people who were in the CDC didn't like the way the county committee was functioning, so they'd run for the County Central

Shirpser: Committee and they'd get their group working for them and get elected. So, then they were both CDC members and part of the County Central Committee. Also, it worked the other way. Regular party people, because the clubs were such a challenge and were so active during the campaign, they decided to become delegates to the convention so they could help influence the clubs.

Chall: That meant that they had to belong to a club?

Shirpser: Yes. They had to be a member. Each club depending upon the size of its membership got one delegate for a certain number of members. Then, naturally, the larger clubs had a larger number of delegates. The individual clubs had to apply to the County Central Committee in its district to receive a charter. That made a working tie between them, too.

The 1954 Endorsing Convention

Chall: Did it come about that there was a lot of backroom politics in the CDC convention that was somewhat like the backroom politics of the oldtime Democratic conventions which the progressives under Hiram Johnson strove to do away with?

Shirpser: We had hoped that this wouldn't happen, but it did. There, again, because so many of the people were young and idealistic they often didn't know what was happening to them. When you've got some of the more-experienced people working, they could have a tremendous influence on the outcome.

For instance, in 1954 if you want to talk about the candidates then--

Chall: Yes, I'd like to.

Endorsing Richard Graves for Governor

Shirpser: The way Richard Graves got the nomination.

Chall: Yes, let's talk about Richard Graves. That's a good example. Let's talk about that.

Shirpser: Well, what have you is this; Richard Graves was a very effective official in the League of California Cities, and therefore he knew a great deal about Sacramento and state government. His background is something I know well because he worked in our store near the U.C. campus.

During his college years, and possibly afterwards for a while, he was in our shoe department, and managed the shoe department. I knew Dick well, he was very likeable and intelligent.

He was a conservative Republican. For instance, I remember arguing with him about the sales tax which, of course, is regressive. No one can deny that the people in the lower income brackets are hit a lot harder than the people in the upper brackets. He was for increasing sales taxes. In those days I wasn't active in politics, you know. It's just that I was a Democrat and I believed in issues which helped the majority of the people rather than the special interests.

In 1954 there were a couple of people who were interested in running for governor, whom I felt were excellent people. One was Rex Nicholson, who had been Adlai's campaign chairman in California, who was a man with a vast experience in government and extremely capable. He had been in the Department of the Interior, and in the Department of Commerce, holding executive positions. He had been in charge of the eleven western states for public housing. He headed his own business which was Ford farm tractors and farm implements, so he had contracts with farmers all over the states. He was truly a self-made man, too. He was probably the best man in organization that I've ever know. This was his forte--to develop an efficient, effective organization. He loved politics and he enjoyed being Adlai's state chairman.

I remember that Rex invited George Killion, and Pat Brown, and me to a club to which he belonged, to discuss with us his chances for the gubernatorial campaign. Pat was the state attorney general then. We were all good friends of Rex. We were all enthusiastic about it. We left there with the plan that we would do everything we could to help him. I don't remember George Miller being there. He may have been, but I don't remember.

Then, George Killion, himself, seemed interested. At least, there was quite a boom for George to run for governor at one point. His name was often mentioned in the press as a

Shirpser: prospective candidate for governor. He never announced his candidacy. I don't think he was ever very serious about it. He might not have appealed as much to the CDC as Rex would have.

Rex was a moderate liberal. Considering he came from Texas he was quite liberal. George Killion had been treasurer of the Democratic National Committee, and he was more affiliated with the "old guard" of politics than Rex. Both of them were wealthy men. There would have been no financial problems in their campaigns, because both had access to large contributions from their friends with whom they associated in business and government.

This was what was in the offing when all of a sudden, out of the clear sky, up popped Richard Graves! He had been a Republican until four days before his announcement that he had become a Democrat. George Miller masterminded this. He had known Dick in Sacramento and worked with him when Dick was with the League of California Cities. (Richard was always called Dick.) I'm sure that he had a sincere opinion that Dick was able and would be a good governor. George took Dick to consul with Ed Heller.

Ed Heller was a good friend of both Rex and George Killion. But Dick Graves and George Miller convinced Ed Heller of the worth of this man to run for governor and of his ability to win the election. These were experienced, pragmatic politicians. I knew it couldn't work, and I was new in politics. But, have you ever heard of a man who has never done one thing for the Democratic party all his life, switching his registration, and four days later announcing he's a Democratic candidate for governor? It's never succeeded.

Wayne Morse (whom I admire and respect so much) when he switched from Republican to Democrat, he had to make that long trek back up the seniority ladder. He had to serve on the lowly Game and Fishery Committee; he was on the Washington, D.C. committee. As a Republican, he had been on the top committees. You simply cannot start at the top when you have switched parties. Look what happened to John Lindsay when he tried it in '72. Wouldn't you think that George Miller and Ed Heller would have known it wouldn't work?

Chall: I find it curious too, that George Miller, who had helped start the CDC and knew what the people in the CDC wanted and were concerned about, would have thought that he could get that

Chall: organization to accept Richard Graves. It was the new organization and he would want a primary endorsement, at least.

Shirpser: Well, I think George felt that his support would convince the convention that this was the man. I was beside myself with frustration. I just didn't see how it could possibly work, and we could, in my opinion, have waged a strong and victorious campaign with Rex Nicholson or George Killion.

Ed Heller started the campaign with a very substantial contribution to Dick Graves. This information went up and down the CDC convention hall. "He won't have to worry about money because Ed Heller is going to be the finance chairman who will see that he has ample funds." This really should not have carried that much weight, because both Rex and George could have rallied funds around their candidacies, too.

After he got the endorsement, the Graves campaign was one of the most ineffective campaigns I ever saw in my life. It never caught on. Democrats simply saw no reason why they should support a man who had been a Republican all his life, and a conservative Republican. When he now said that the sales tax is regressive and for twenty years before he had said that it was not regressive, it's hard to accept. You don't usually see a great white light and suddenly change most ideas you previously had. It's a pity because I think Dick Graves would have been a good governor.

The convention endorsement came after much bitterness and disunity. People felt that they had been led around by the nose; they hadn't wanted him and somehow they found they had him. There was an awful lot of behind-the-scenes maneuvering, and smoke-filled rooms, and everything we had hoped not to have.

Chall: Could we go into that just a little bit?

Shirpser: I don't know how much more I can tell you about that, except that George Miller was the one backing him and he said Ed Heller would take a prominent role in the campaign. Ellie had been national committeewoman, you know, before my term. Everyone seemed to think that with this backing and with him making all these liberal statements which they took in good faith... Maybe he made them in good faith, maybe he did see that the way he had been going was not the way, and that he no longer believed what he had been saying in the past.

- Shirpser: We have forgotten one candidate. Laurance Cross was a potential candidate for governor.
- Chall: Yes. We discussed this in an earlier interview.* There was dissension in the 1954 CDC convention and it was their first convention. There was the problem over the selection and endorsement of Richard Graves for governor. Laurance Cross had been considered a candidate, so had Rex Nicholson and George Killion. What happened to Nicholson?
- Shirpser: Well, he did not actually seek it then. It was just something we thought would be excellent, but he did not officially actually seek the office after Richard Graves announced his candidacy for governor.
- Chall: And Pat Brown? He was then attorney general and didn't want to run at that time?
- Shirpser: He was doing a good job where he was and decided to wait.
- Chall: Earl Warren was going to the Supreme Court. At any rate, Earl Warren had said he would not run again, which meant that he would not be the Republican candidate to oppose. It would probably be Knight. And so, it was an opening for the Democrats.
- Shirpser: Yes. That is what made it so desireable to get the nomination for governor.

Endorsing Sam Yorty for Senate

- Chall: What about the controversy about the endorsement for U.S. senator? My understanding is that Peter Odegard was a possible candidate in the CDC convention against Yorty in '54, but that he backed away from it.
- Shirpser: Sam Yorty got the nomination for United States senator. Well, Sam in those days was not the conservative he later became.
- Chall: Why was there such a dissension over that too? As I understand it, from reading some letters of yours that you had written to

*See Chapter I, page 22.

Chall: Steve Mitchell, Bert Coffey was apparently in charge of a stop Yorty move. That is, he had held several meetings in this move to stop Yorty. And you assumed that George Miller was behind this. When it got to the convention Yorty did come out with the endorsement for the Senate.

Shirpser: George Miller was opposed to Yorty for U.S. Senate. He said so in public. Elizabeth Synder and Congressman Chet Holifield were strongly for Yorty. They even were able to persuade Richard Richards, liberal, intelligent, and courageous candidate for state senate to second Yorty's nomination. This gave Sam a lot of votes.

I told Sam Yorty that he was fanatical on the subject of anti-communism, and I thought he ought to key down. He had been a good congressman. He had a lot of experience in politics. I'd gotten to know him well. He sometimes campaigned with Estes when Estes was in California when Sam was running for the U.S. Senate. He has a lovely wife, we were friends. I don't agree with Sam on some issues, but I could see him as a good senator.

Years later, I did break with Sam. You never knew what he was going to say or do next. He'd go off on these tangents. He supported Nixon and still he said he was a good Democrat. I mean, a man who holds public office can't do that. There have been Democrats I don't support, but I don't make public statements against them or support the opposition party. You have to have party responsibility when you hold political office.

On the other hand, if they'd given him more support maybe he wouldn't have gone "off the reservation" so far. He felt that the Democratic party betrayed him. You know, he was hissed and booed off the platform. CDC convention in either '56 or '58.

Chall: I have that as '56.

Shirpser: He tried to talk and they wouldn't listen, and loudly booed him and he finally swore at the audience, and walked off the stage.

Chall: Well, apparently he has had quite a bit of trouble with the Democratic party for years.

Shirpser: Yes.

Chall: But, with the stop Yorty move there may have been something going on--a play between the endorsement of either Odegard or Yorty--early. I understand that Odegard backed away because he felt that he would not be able to raise the money.

Shirpser: It was so long ago, and I can't find my file on the CDC. It's such a source of aggravation to me, because I had a whole CDC file with all of this information in it, and I lent it to somebody and it was not returned to me, unfortunately.

Some Final Comments

Shirpser: Perhaps, I've been too defensive about the CDC and the fact that I really think I was the first one to recognize the value of the clubs and to organize them. When George Miller wanted to call the convention I was delighted because this was the objective I wanted to be achieved, and I joined with him then.

Here are comments from some letters I received, while organizing and speaking to clubs. This is one from Long Beach, "I want to let you know how much we loved you and appreciated your visit. I'll get off the clippings, and there's lots of enthusiasm for a new club." This other letter is from Laura Cofield of Napa. She had been to Sacramento where I had spoken at a Democratic women's conference. She invited me to a tea as their guest of honor and hoped I'll give "another inspiring talk" as in Sacramento.

This was about a meeting in San Francisco. A group of doctors wanted me to come and talk to them. I was at the home of friends. My hostess said, "Most of them had more food for thought than ever had been given them. All of them, without exception, were impressed by you yourself..." I won't go on with her praise, but she ends up, "...what I say is 'Shirpser for President.'"

Chall: Now, what are you planning to do with all of these letters in the folder? Will they go into The Bancroft Library with your other papers?

Shirpser: If you want them, yes. I'm just passing over many other letters.

Chall: Yes, but other people can use them.

Shirpser: Yes, of course. This one was funny. He said, "As our guest of honor we'll have California's pride and joy, Clara Shirpser." They often were such warm letters. In each case I felt that I'd accomplished something. I wasn't seeking praise. I was trying to encourage enthusiasm for the job that needed to be done. And that was my big reward: that I was able to work at the grass-roots level, which was the only way I could see to get started to build a stronger and more effective Democratic party in California.

VIII ACTIVITIES AS NATIONAL COMMITTEEWOMAN, 1953-1954
 (Interviews 9 and 10, February 7, and February 14, 1973)

Meeting the Nation's Leaders in Washington, D.C.

Shirpser: I've told you about so many problems. I ought to talk about some of the joys, too. I went to my first National Committee meeting in Washington, D.C. after the election (because I didn't have time ever to go to whatever was going on there. I had to stay in California to work on the campaign). There, the reward for the hard work done at home is realized, because in Washington it means something to be Democratic National Committeewoman. The doors are open with a welcome wherever you want to go on The Hill, to the senators, and congressmen. As I got to know them, it was easier to get them to come to California to help us build the Democratic party. I was the liaison between Washington and California along with the national committeeman.

Sometimes I had to battle for it, as John Anson Ford had to do, too.

Chall: Yes, I can see it from your correspondence.

Shirpser: Yes. The National Committee might bypass both of us and call the State Central Committee. That made confusion, and duplication; schedules would get fouled up. At an executive committee meeting of the State Central Committee I asked that the perogatives of my office be carried out, that I was the liaison with the National Committee's Speaker's Bureau, and I asked them to vote accordingly, to strengthen my position. The executive committee voted to make me and the national committeeman the official liaison between California and Washington, D.C. with the Speaker's Bureau and campaign committees. Cap Harding was head of the House Campaign Committee and was a delight to work with, and the Senate Campaign Committee was chaired by Senator Clements, who was most cooperative too.

Shirpser: When Bernie Sisk decided to run for Congress in 1954, few people in Washington had ever heard of him, but he had worked with the clubs, and he was their choice. When I went to Washington and spoke to Cap Harding and said that he needed some help he said, "I never heard of him. He hasn't got a chance." I said, "Would you like to make a small wager?" He said, "Sure." As I got to know Bernie, I realized that he would be a fine congressman, and we became good friends--and still are.

Well, I gave him odds. Bernie (we used to call him Tex because he came from Texas) won. I brought Estes there as the focal point for a big meeting; later, India Edwards, too, came to help Bernie--at my invitation. Cap said that he valued my judgment on this and he gave me a contribution for Bernie's campaign, which was of great value, and he wanted me to keep him informed because there was only enough money to give certain candidates who had a chance of winning. Obviously, the wise thing to do is to put it into the campaign that has a chance of winning instead of dividing it on an even basis. If a man or a woman hasn't got a chance, it's sad that you can't help everyone equally, but when there's a certain amount of money you have to divide it in the most effective manner.

I have a lot of letters here from Earl Clements who was the senator in charge of the Speaker's Bureau. We had a most friendly relationship. He often asked for my opinion and said how well the tours were going, and the senators were coming back, pleased with my arrangements. Once that was established, my role was much more pleasant.

When I went to Washington, friends were wonderful about entertaining me. It's such fun to go with a senator, who is a friend, to the Senate Dining Room and have people come flocking over to greet you, and feeling that you are a part of all this. Of course, this is true equally in the House.

On my first visit to Washington, I thought, "Since I don't know some of the California congressmen very well, I'll invite them all to a cocktail party." I didn't know if this was good form or not, but it seemed to me to be a fine idea for all of us to get together and get a chance to know each other. So, I asked India where I should have it. She said, "I belong to the Sulgrave Club. That is a very prestigious club. You will impress them if you invite them to the Sulgrave Club." In fact, she had previously asked me if I wanted to stay there when I visited Washington. But, I thought maybe the atmosphere

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Shirpser: might be too rarified, so India put me in the Women's Democratic Club which was a traditional colonial residence with only two or three guest rooms. I got teased about that constantly because this was a place where no one could come in without a key; or after a certain hour, perhaps ten or ten-thirty you were not allowed to bring in male guests even if you just sat in the living room and talked. So I was asked: "Was I afraid of them?" "Was I scared to be in a hotel?" "Didn't I have more confidence in myself that I had to be hidden away in a nunnery?" Oh, I took an awful ribbing. I never went back there again to stay.

But, it was a very comfortable place. They had a big, beautiful living room and I had a large bedroom, all furnished in colonial furniture and a fireplace. They brought me breakfast in bed. So, it was delightful and inexpensive, too, but I never went back. [Laughter]

Chall: You had to prove your confidence.

Shirpser: Estes, of course, was especially good to me while I was in Washington. Every morning he would call me and ask what I was doing that day or evening. If I weren't busy then he would say, "Nancy and I are going to do such-and-such, I'll come and call for you." So, through him, even though he lost the presidential nomination, I really had entry to places I never would have gone otherwise, and many wonderful experiences and contacts.

I remember that Martha Ragland from Tennessee (his national committeewoman) was in Washington for a National Committee meeting, so Estes invited Martha and me to dinner at their home. When Estes called for us he said, "En route we're going to stop off at a reception (some labor reception of prominent labor officials in Washington) and I want you to come, too." We said, "That would be wonderful." So, we stopped at the Mayflower Hotel and we walked into this huge ballroom and a man came over and said, "Senator, this is a stag party!" Here, Estes arrived with a woman on each arm! So, Estes said, "Well, they're here. Delegate someone to take them to the bar and give them a drink while I visit with the boys." We never knew what was going to happen with Estes as our guide.

Then, once I had a marvelous experience going with him to see John L. Lewis, head of the miner's labor group, with his beetle brows and the fierce look. He turned out to be one of the gentlest, sweetest people I've ever met. He called me "Miss Clara" and he kept asking me questions about California. He was

Shirpser: a delightful person to meet. Well, these are just some of the fine sidelights of visiting in Washington.

I went to cocktail parties with Nancy and Estes. One of them was at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Jack Fry, the head of TWA, and it was a very elegant party. Normally, I wouldn't have met them or the "important" people who were there. Estes would introduce me, "This is Clara Shirpser, one of my best friends, from California." You know, this got me off to a wonderful start, and I made many interesting contacts.

I sometimes thought that more legislation was really organized and accomplished in cocktail parties such as this one than on the floor of the Senate.

Chall: Isn't that generally considered to be true? .

Shirpser: Yes. [Laughter] But, I really thought of it often by myself. Senators and congressmen were discussing important questions during cocktail parties. I remember attending a small, private dinner being given in Estes' honor. It was a beautifully appointed dinner. I was sitting next to a lobbyist for Standard Oil. I said to him, "Please explain this to me: Estes is for reducing the oil depletion allowance. How is it that you are praising him this way?" He said, "Years ago we had an economic conference in my state, and Senator Paul Douglas (who was professor of economics at the University of Chicago) was our scheduled guest. At the last minute he couldn't come, and he said he was sending us a young congressman by the name of Estes Kefauver who was well grounded in economics. Of course, we were disappointed. We didn't know anything about Estes Kefauver. But this was what we had to do, to accept him as a substitute for Senator Douglas.

"Congressman Kefauver came and he made a marvelous speech on the economic situation in this country. We asked him question after question and he always gave constructive and informative answers. I came away so impressed with his ability in this field that even though I don't agree with him regarding the oil depletion allowance, we still think he is one of the best senators in the whole United States."

So, I kept getting new facets of Estes' character in this way. I was very impressed that he was able to influence them to that extent because he never accepted large sums from anyone who had special interests. He needed funds terribly, but he never took them, if they had any "strings" attached to them.

Chall: And what would have been the point of a dinner like this?
Simply a testimonial?

Shirpsers: It was. Estes called his host and said that I was there and he'd like me to be included. This sort of inclusion was wonderful for me.

Chall: Well, of course, California was a pivotal state and it still is, so a person who is a national committeeman or national committeewoman is considered to be important in the party and to have some knowledge about what's going on. And they need that too, don't they?

Shirpsers: Well, of course. But, normally I don't think I would have been included in social events of this sort.

Chall: If you hadn't been a national committeewoman?

Shirpsers: No, this invitation was because I was such a close friend of Estes. He would say, "A very dear friend of mine is in town and I would like to have her included." When I wasn't busy with other activities, I was always welcome to come to the Kefauver home for dinner. Many times they would have a few people to dinner to meet me. All of this makes your life such a happy one in Washington.

To get back to the Sulgrave Club. I sent each of the California congressmen an invitation before I arrived in Washington and said that I'd like them to be my guests for cocktails at the Sulgrave Club. One after another came to my party, and those who knew me well would say, "How the hell did you get to entertain at the Sulgrave Club? I've been in Washington for a year and a half and it's the first time I've come in these sacred portals!" This amused me. Around us, of course, there were admirals and generals in uniform and many well known Washington people. It was fun to ask them to someplace which would impress them and make them think that I knew my way around Washington, even though this was my first official visit there. I don't mean this as superficially as it sounds.

Chall: How did India happen to belong to the Sulgrave Club?

Shirpsers: India was well liked, and she had a social life as well as her political one. And she was such a great woman in her own right, that there were very few doors closed to her. I think she belonged to practically everything that was worth belonging to.

Shirpser: This was a beautiful club with fine food and lovely surroundings.

It just occurred to me to mention that this is the letter from Nancy Kefauver telling me that "...it was a real pleasure to have you with us on your last visit. The children loved being remembered with the delicious candy. And don't kill yourself next year! Keep well, our love and all good wishes..." So, she was aware that I was working too hard and was trying to have me do less, even though I was working for Estes.

Relationships with Officers and Members of the Democratic National Committee

Steve Mitchell

Shirpser: As I start going into the Steve Mitchell file (Democratic National Committee chairman), I'm perplexed, because one time I got a letter telling me that he was so appreciative of the good work I was doing and how much they were depending on me, and then all of a sudden a blow would come such as Hy Raskin's letter to me regarding my office! There were highs and lows all the time. It never seemed possible to establish a good, consistent, logical working relationship. This letter from Hy Raskin is one of the things I resented most in all my political career.

Out of the clear sky, one day I received a letter from Hy Raskin who was a paid employee of the Democratic National Committee. To think that Steve Mitchell wouldn't have had the courtesy to write me himself if there were a problem, but to just turn it over to an assistant, made me deeply resentful. I'll read you one paragraph out of it. "...to carry out the conventional functions of a national committeeman or woman, neither the maintenance of an office or the expense involved seem justified, since under usual circumstances a national committeeman or woman acts as a liaison between the national headquarters and the state committee. Historically, the National Committee is a creature of national conventions, most of the work expected of the individuals on this committee is done at the convention and in national campaigns. Any other political activity during the interval should be part of state activity, as distinguished from separate activity in order to be effective and helpful to the party as a whole." And he goes on to say that there may be

Shirpser: a question as to whether it was illegal for me to solicit funds for my expenses! I had never solicited funds for my expenses. My friends had banded together voluntarily as a committee and they contributed voluntarily to pay part of my office expenses.

I called John Anson Ford and he had received a similar letter. I think there were seventeen attorneys on my committee, and obviously they would know what is legal or not. This committee voluntarily got together when George Miller moved; they voluntarily contributed. No one person gave more than \$100; some contributed less. I'll read from my letter to Steve Mitchell because it does cover the situation.

"My friends on this finance committee were unanimous in their amazement and resentment that you did not discuss a matter of such importance with me, instead of having an assistant write to me, and that you did not seek to learn the facts through consultation with me instead of directing that such a letter be written. You were here on May 19." I received the Raskin letter on June 23. My committee wrote to him strongly, too, protesting that such a letter be written to me, explaining that they had solicited the funds and they intended to continue to support my office. There were many well known California Democrats in this committee formed to assist me.

I reminded Mr. Mitchell, during the campaign, I had sent him \$500, voluntarily, from my own funds. I also told him, as an example of how hard I had worked raising funds for them during the last weeks of the campaign, I received an urgent wire from Dwight Palmer, national treasurer, and in spite of the fact that I was exhausted from just coming back from a very difficult campaign trip, I stayed on the phone almost around the clock and raised another \$1300.

This was very difficult at the last minute in the campaign because people had already contributed who intended to do so. I told him that I'd sold nineteen out of thirty-five tickets which the entire Northern California committee had sold for the regional dinner in Los Angeles where Adlai was speaking.

Then I also reminded him that John Hoving, who was the manager of the Democratic Digest voluntarily informed me that I sold more subscriptions to the Democratic Digest than any other person in the whole country. Without the Digest subscriptions, I had raised over \$5000 for the National Committee. I also told him that after the campaign ended, a friend had sent me \$200,

- Shirpser: knowing that I had campaign debts. I asked her if I could divide it with the National Committee because I knew they were in debt, too. So, I kept \$100 and sent them \$100. All this was an example of what...
- Chall: Well, what you were doing was justifying your work as a national committeewoman. But, was this an attempt to indicate why you needed an office.
- Shirpser: Yes, surely. Because I couldn't have done all of this from my home. If I had lived in San Francisco and if I had had a large home there, I might well have put aside a room as an office and perhaps had volunteers or an answering service there. But, living in Berkeley I had to have headquarters in San Francisco to function effectively and to have a place for committee meetings.
- Chall: Also, I think you pointed out, too, that Mrs. Heller had had offices over the years and nobody had ever complained about this.
- Shirpser: Yes, yes. I explained to him that my predecessor had a suite of three offices and two paid staff members, and she sometimes had separate offices from the state chairman. I asked if the former chairman of the Democratic National Committee had written through an assistant to Mrs. Heller asking her to close up her office, saying to her "Neither the maintenance of an office nor the expense involved seemed justified." I was absolutely sure that no one would have dared to do that to her.

Then, I also enclosed an itinerary for the past two months which were supposedly a vacation period. This itinerary is quite impressive to me now. The number of places I went and what I did in making speeches, and organizing, I don't know how I had the energy to do it, but I'm glad that I was able to do this and I thought that my activities were producing results.

I asked him, "When invitations come to me to speak from all over the state, and George Miller, who was a state senator, is in the legislative session and can't fill political engagements, do you think it has value for me to go into the field and work with these people and enlist their enthusiasm and active participation, or do you think it's a waste of money for me to pay \$50 a month for an office which I keep going with volunteers?" Of course, there were many more expenses, the long distance telephone calls, some printing and postage of

Shirpser: invitations, and so on. Then, I reminded him of a luncheon which had been annoying to me. It had been just previous to this, too.

"When you were here on May 19, Don Bradley, State Central Committee director, suggested that I take complete charge of a luncheon for you, and asked me to send out the invitations in my name, as has been customary in the past when the national chairman visited California. Instead, I asked George Miller to sign the invitations with me, and he did so. I consulted with him all along the way for this luncheon. That's why I was so taken aback when you said to me after we were seated at the head table, 'Are you the chairman today?' When I answered in the affirmative you said, 'You get a lot more consideration than most national committeewomen. They're usually introduced, but not allowed to be chairman.'"

Well, this was really insulting! I had worked my head off to make this luncheon in his honor a success. He hadn't let me know until nine or ten days before this luncheon that he was coming, and he wanted people there who had contributed \$100 or more previously. This meant checking several lists, this meant rushing through the printing, it meant staying up at night getting the invitations out, it meant following up with telephone calls. I did succeed in getting more than a hundred people there. All this was completely through my own efforts. So, I believe that I answered him to the effect that "I'm sorry that this is such a surprise to you, but the people in this area wanted me to be the chairman. They think I am a capable chairman. That's more than I've ever heard from you."

This was the sort of problem I continued to have with Steve Mitchell. It kept me in a state of aggravation and tension. First, there would be a letter of praise, "You did a marvelous job on this regional dinner in Los Angeles. We couldn't have succeeded without you." And then comes an insult like this Raskin letter. Wouldn't you think that by then he would have realized what kind of person I was, and that I could be depended upon to organize and put together the schedules for all the visiting senators as well as for him? Surely I had the ability to get a luncheon meeting together, and if I did it all, who should be chairman but I? I think that was a part of his derogatory opinion of women.

This was very discouraging. I don't believe I've ever told you how the National Committee lists were made up either. If they're no longer that way it's because a group of women got together and protested--I among them. The list would state, "The

Shirpser: Honorable John Anson Ford, national committeeman for California,"
 "Mrs. Clara Shirpser, national committeewoman for California."
 I didn't mind much when it was John, but I certainly did when
 it got to be Paul Ziffren, that he was called "Honorable" and I
 wasn't!

That's one more piece of evidence of how women were regarded
 in politics. When you're both holding the same office, if either
 is to get the title of "Honorable" both should, or neither should.
 From all the evidence, in politics, women had a secondary role.

Chall: It's interesting that in terms of the politics of the period,
 the fact that there had to be one woman and one man from each
 state gave a woman a position in politics that she probably
 would never have had otherwise. And yet, the fact that she was
 there didn't necessarily mean that she had a place, really.

Shirpser: You had to battle for it all the way. The responsibilities were
 always given you, but the perogatives and the privileges rarely
 were, unless you did fight for your rights. Now, I don't believe
 this was true of Ellie Heller because she was a very wealthy
 woman, and she contributed very generously, always. This gave
 her a status that the usual national committeewoman doesn't
 have.

On the other hand, as I told you, she hated to make speeches
 and she rarely went out from her office. She served her term
 in one way and I did in another. Then, when you evaluate the
 two, naturally there are great pluses for her, but I think there
 were pluses for me, too. There was the hard work and the
 organizational work I did, and the way people turned to me for
 some leadership which they hadn't previously done.

Chall: Were there many national committeewomen who operated the way you
 did?

Shirpser: I think not. The active women were mostly the Kefauver women.
 We were a whole new fresh breeze sweeping through that national
 committee. The first meeting or two I noticed that women who
 had been on the committee for many years, older women, were
 usually given a resolution honoring someone who had recently
 died, and to speak for them, and say how much we missed them,
 and to commemorate this. Or maybe they'd occasionally introduce
 a minor official, or something of this sort. But, the important
 policy resolutions were usually made by the man.

Shirpser: I think most of the national committeewomen were satisfied to have it so. This is the way it had been. Many women just relaxed and enjoyed it. You know, you can have a wonderful time if that's all you wanted. That's what many of these women did want. But, all the Kefauver national committeewomen, the new ones, were younger women. And we were full of the desire to make changes where we saw changes needed to be.

In the beginning I think we were a "pain in the neck" to many of the older National Committee members. Later, they came to realize that we were sincerely motivated and the ideas we brought up were often creative, and we got more and more support as time went on. As we served on committees (I was on the Credentials Committee and so was Martha Ragland from Tennessee), many of us got to know other members well, and we would express our ideas and they came to have confidence in us, and to see that we weren't there to make trouble. We were there to accomplish something.

So, as the years went by we had more and more support. I think we served a valuable purpose because when you just have a group of people who go on year after year and who are older people and somewhat tired, and are accustomed to accepting things as they are--I think I've said this before, but when you are new you don't know you can't do something, you often go out and try to do it, and sometimes you do accomplish your objective.

Chall: Did any of them have the same problems within their states as you did?

Shirpser: Yes. But, I think I had more trouble than most other members because of the kind of state chairman I had. Later, when Roger Kent was chairman, I didn't have all these problems. By then Roger had gotten to know me, too, and had confidence in what I could accomplish and was glad to turn over some of this hard work to me. I was there ready and willing, and occasionally able; I think it was George and his devoted assistant, Bert Coffey, that were the source of my problem. Later when Don Bradley was the paid director of the State Central Committee, I've spoken of how well I was able to work with him. Steve Mitchell again let Don Bradley know he was coming and he didn't let me know. And so, Don called me immediately and told me and we worked together. Don asked me to be chairman of that meeting. Don had a lot more respect for me and more belief in whatever capabilities I had.

Shirpsen: At a meeting, when he was in California, Steve Mitchell sat beside me complaining and complaining about what was wrong in California. In contrast, I was pleased at the growing unity of our party in California. I didn't know on what he was basing this criticism. He wouldn't tell me. So, I supposed some letters were sent to him with complaints.

On the other side of me at this meeting Pat Brown was sitting and he was our attorney general. So, I turned to Pat Brown and I said, "Steve Mitchell is full of complaints about what's wrong with the Democratic party in California. Why don't you express your opinion of this to him?" So, Pat really took him on (they were talking across me) and ended by saying that he had never known a time when there was more unity and a stronger Democratic organization in California, and that this was due to the leadership of George Miller and Clara, too. So, that silenced Mr. Mitchell for a little bit.

Anyway, you can go over the itinerary. I think I counted about thirty-one meetings at which I spoke in two months, in different parts of the state. This was in answer to invitations which I received.

Chall: I'd like to put that in.

Shirpsen: Yes. There's nothing like delving through these voluminous papers. But, the upshot of this Hy Raskin letter was that I told Steve Mitchell that, before the next National Committee meeting, I was going to write a letter to all the members of the Democratic National Committee and ask them, regardless of sex, how many had a separate office.

Well, this alarmed him. He didn't want this to come up in a meeting because he knew I would get support and not he. So, he wrote me a letter of apology from which I would like to quote. Because it was something of a triumph for me. I learned that I had to "stand up" to him. I would not take his unfair criticism "sitting down." I'm not a person with a chip on my shoulder. I didn't provoke this thing. It came from Hy Raskin, at Mitchell's instigation.

From Steve Mitchell's letter to me: "As I told you at our conference on Wednesday, I'm deeply concerned by your distress following Mr. Raskin's letter. Since that time I am much encouraged by the reports, both from Mr. Ford and you, and other party leaders. And I believe there is a much better understanding there among all concerned with mutual cooperation, and that this will continue to improve. Indeed, good results are already

Enclosure
ITINERARY OF CLARA SHIRPER
May 15th - July 15th, 1953.

sent to Steve Mitchell
31 meetings listed 280a

Stockton Conference of Northern California Democrats - 2 days. I attended five Committee meetings, as well as the General Session. In the five committee conferences, each Chairman asked me to speak and answer questions. By-laws and history of the Republican Assembly which served as the pattern the new organization were prepared at my request by a Political Science Professor, and I had copies made for the various Chairmen.

Alto. I was the Speaker at a Dinner meeting, invitation from Alan Cran-
...Chairman Santa Clara County Council of Democratic Clubs, and Chairman of
Interim Committee on Organization for Northern California, *which led to the formation of new clubs*

Al. Lunch with Democratic Party leaders, Chairman of 13th Congressional
District, County Chairman, President Womens Club, President of new Democratic

Alto. Invitation to Democratic Workshop Conference from Co-Chairmen, 11th
Congressional District and Assemblyman Ralph Brown, Stanislaus and San Joaquin
ties. I participated in all the Committee meetings at the Chairmen's re-
st (four). I made the address at the dinner which concluded the Conference,
attendance over 150.

Merille. 7 County Democratic Conferences; invitation from the two-Co-Chairmen
the 3rd Congressional District. George Miller, Jr. and I were invited to
address the General Session, and attend the Committee sessions preceding it.

San Francisco Conference in San Francisco. I was invited by the President
to speak at their General Session.

Costa County Democratic Women's Clubs luncheon for Mrs. Robert Condon.
I was their guest of honor and speaker.

Costa County Democratic Council of Clubs Picnic. George Miller and I
were the invited speakers.

President of the 16th Assembly District Club invited me to address their
meeting.

President of the 17th Assembly District Club (Oakland and Berkeley) invited me
to address their meeting.

Assisted in organizing and was invited to speak at several new clubs:

Alameda Democratic Club

Stockton Democratic Women's Club -

Berkeley Grassrooters Democratic Club

Vallejo Democratic Women's Club

Napa County Democratic Women's Club

Sacramento Democratic Women's Club - not approved

at: Alameda County Central Committee (of which I am a ~~new~~ member)

Alameda County Democratic Council of Clubs (of which I am a member)

17th Congressional District Democratic Council of Clubs (of which I am a member).

ITINERARY May 15th - July 15th.

arranged the May 19th luncheon at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco, at which you spoke on the need for a National Advisory Council, and for funds for the Democratic National Committee. I checked many lists in an attempt to find all the contributors of \$100.00 or more. This was made difficult by the fact that you did not send the finance lists of contributors to the National Committee as you promised to do over the phone, and by the fact that you did not get in touch with my office until nine days before the luncheon. I made up the lists with Don Bradley's help. I rushed through mimeographing and addressing of the invitations, and handled all of the reservations through my office (with volunteers). I spent much time on the phone trying to get the people there whom you wanted, ~~not~~ at this short notice. Not one hundred did come, and they were all people who contributed a minimum of \$100.00 or more.

participated in the Annual Democratic Women's Legislative Conference in Sacramento, and attended the Caucus Luncheon in Sacramento at the invitation of the Minority Floor Leader, Vincent Thomas, and spoke to the Assemblymen. While visiting the legislature, I was asked to give a press interview by political editors representing five newspapers and three new services, and discussed issues and candidates, reported on my Washington visit, and this secured front page coverage in many Sacramento, Oakland and San Francisco papers. I am pleased at the friendly relationship I have established with the press.

was asked to write an article reviewing the 1st 100 Days of the Eisenhower Administration by a non-partisan California newspaper.

was the only woman in a group of nine who were chosen by several ^{Democratic} organizations to sign a letter ~~sent~~ urging bi-partisan support of S. Con. Res. 32, introduced by Senators Flanders and John Sparkman. This letter was sent to thousands of members, and a half-page ad was featured in the local newspaper this week.

In addition to my political activities, I have tried to find time for some of my many civic activities in which I formerly participated. I think these contacts are important to the Democratic Party. I served as one of a group of five asked to be consultants for a Model Senate by the student body of the University of California. I was a member of a panel at a recent symposium at U.C. by the Citizenship Clearing House, an organization whose objective is to encourage college men and women to participate in politics. I am a member of the current Berkeley Social Welfare Committee, the Herrick Hospital Women's Division (our community health center where I recently was a member of the Women's Division); have spoken at meetings of Business and Professional Women, Soroptomists, A.A.U.W.. The Bonds for Israel Committee asked me by inviting me to introduce Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt at her recent Bay Area Luncheon. All too seldom, I find time to participate in the organization which I enjoy, and where I received some training, the League of Women Voters.

In my opinion, and that of my advisors, my political activities have been integrated with that of the state and local Committees, and at their suggestions.

Shirpsen: apparent. (It's nice he could realize this so shortly after that Raskin letter was written!) And I'm hopeful for the future and grateful to all of the individuals concerned."

I won't go on with the whole letter, but this paragraph I find enlightening. "I am glad to assure you that this is a California matter to be decided there, and to be settled between you and the party leaders there, rather than a problem for determination by people outside the state. Our efforts were intended to bring about a better understanding. (Hmphh!)" "In setting the record straight, I should like to repeat my conviction that you have been most devoted to the objectives and the best interests of our Democratic party. And I think you have been most helpful in many ways. Also, I must say I think that you have been more understanding and patient with me than I have been with you." (I think he really should have said that.) "If I have offended you in the slightest way during our official relationship, I am most sincerely regretful and apologetic. I certainly regret the omission made when my staff failed to notify you about the planning for my trip to the west in May."

Yet the unforgettable and unforgiveable Mitchell letter to Paul Ziffren followed within a few months, which again bypassed me completely. So, it was always up and down with Mitchell. I don't know why it wasn't possible to establish a better working relationship with him. Certainly the provocation I had at his hands was terrible.

Chall: Now, to go back to the original letter that Raskin wrote to you. Do you think that this letter came as a result of grumblings and complainings from California people? It wouldn't have just come from national for no reason, because they really couldn't have cared that much.

Shirpsen: Well, when Hy Raskin was here he was very difficult. He was a very arrogant, overbearing sort of person. He had all the answers. He made contacts with several people who were trouble makers and self-seeking. As an example, there was Mrs. McCarthy. She had recently moved to the Bay Area. She had great political ambitions. She wrote to Mr. Raskin, and she drove a big car, and she had a big home which she would offer for meetings. She would turn up at the airport (without being invited, to join a group meeting arriving Democratic officials from Washington, D.C.) and thrust herself in and get introduced to the visiting people. She was really awfully "pushy" and difficult to work with.

Shirpser: I know that she offered to drive Hy Raskin to a meeting, and I suppose she unloaded to him a lot of stuff against me, and one of her resentments I will explain now. It's strange how things can happen that are unforeseen can create a bad situation when you have the best will in the world.

Eleanor Roosevelt was here twice and I had had the privilege of knowing her quite well and traveling with her when she was here campaigning for Adlai. Of course, this was a great joy. I just worshipped her and her husband, President Franklin Roosevelt, whom I never, unfortunately, got to know. I was asked to introduce Mrs. Roosevelt at a large regional meeting for Israel bonds, at which she spoke, and that was a great privilege. The picture is there on the wall. And she wrote me a wonderful letter afterwards.

When we were having a meeting in San Francisco, I think that Mrs. McCarthy was chairman of the San Francisco Women's Democratic Forum at that time. I asked India and Eleanor Roosevelt to write her afterwards because of the situation that had developed. Mrs. McCarthy wrote directly to Mrs. Roosevelt and asked her to speak at their meeting instead of going through me, which was the necessary procedure to get national speakers. Mrs. Roosevelt wrote back and said that it had to be cleared with me. So, I had quite a situation here because Mrs. McCarthy insisted that Mrs. Roosevelt was to come only for the San Francisco Forum, which had had a membership of only fifty or sixty women.

Chall: Is this a Democratic group of women?

Shirpser: Yes, it's the Democratic Women's Forum in San Francisco. It's an older group and well established. When the leadership was good it was excellent and when it wasn't it was quite ineffective. So, I insisted that we had to ask women from all over the Northern California area. When you have a distinguished national person like Eleanor Roosevelt you certainly don't confine it to a meeting of one local group of fifty women.

I had to bring a lot of pressure on Mrs. McCarthy from her own membership before she was willing to extend the invitation to the others. Naturally, I went to the airport to meet Mrs. Roosevelt with Mrs. McCarthy. Then there was the procedure of sending an escort to Mrs. Roosevelt's room to bring her to the meeting. This was a Northern California Women's Division meeting in the Bay Area. With consultation with Mrs. McCarthy I recommended that the congressional district woman co-chairman

Shirpser: for Northern California be asked to escort her, as well as anyone else who held any other office such as the Northern California chairman of the Women's Division. I had already visited with her, and I did not want to be included in the "escort" group.

We carefully got together a list of about eight women to go to Mrs. Roosevelt's room to escort her to the meeting. I had to go to the lobby and make a phone call, and at the desk there was Eleanor Roosevelt. So, I went up to her, and she said, "Mrs. Shirpser I've been trying to find you all over the place. Why should I stay in my room alone--I'm through resting--when I could be meeting a whole group of Democratic women? I want to go to that meeting." So, I said, "An escort group is supposed to come and get you from your room, Mrs. Roosevelt." She said, "Oh, forget about the escort. Just bring me into the meeting now." And I did.

Several of those women who were to escort her were furious at me. I explained as best I could. I mean, what could you do when there's Mrs. Roosevelt standing at the desk saying, "I don't want to go back to my room and wait for someone to come and get me. I want to go to the meeting." And everyone was scattered around the Fairmont Hotel lobby or in the meeting room. I couldn't gather those eight women together while Mrs. Roosevelt just stood there at the desk. I brought her right up to Mrs. McCarthy in the meeting room, and explained the situation and thought, "Well, everyone can be a good sport. They'll have more time with Eleanor Roosevelt, which is the main thing."

Maybe that was one source of the letter. I don't know. I'm sure Mrs. McCarthy must have said some derogatory things about me to Hy Raskin. But, if he'd spoken to any of the responsible leaders in this area I am positive they would have given him the opposite impression. Because the many letters I have received demonstrate this. I mean, they came from all over the state, from all the official party people, the new clubs, women's organizations. So, I don't feel any sense of guilt about the way I conducted myself regarding Mrs. Roosevelt's meeting, which was truly a success, and well attended, too.

Chall: And George Miller by that time wouldn't have cared?

Shirpser: No. We were working together cooperatively on the organization of the clubs. I praised him publicly many times. Once he "took the ball" for the clubs he and I together fought the battle of the clubs in all the regular party organization meetings,

Shirpser: because many of them did consider that the clubs were given too much responsibility; they were unofficial, they had no right to take over what the regular party officials were accustomed to do. But, in self-defense, the regular party officials joined the clubs, and vice versa. So, they became well integrated.

Chall: Do you think this was something that was unofficial and petty?

Shirpser: Yes. I didn't like Hy Raskin and he probably didn't like me. I don't like people who try to bully me and tell me what to do and how to do it. I expect to be asked, at least, and then I try to be fair and objective. I know there were certain areas in California where he was not welcome to come, because of the arrogant manner in which he conducted himself.

He was so different from Adlai to whom he was close. Mr. Raskin came from Illinois, too. He knew Steve Mitchell previously, and that's why he was there.

John Anson Ford made a mistake in strategy, in my opinion. He wrote to Hy Raskin defending himself. I didn't bother with Hy Raskin. I went right over his head to the man responsible, who was my chairman, Steve Mitchell. Hy Raskin had nothing to do with me, really, except as a staff member. I think he was called vice-chairman of the Democratic National Committee. But it was Steve Mitchell with whom I had the problem. And as you see, I solved it.

Chall: Now, taking up Steve Mitchell and his sort of blowing hot and cold. Do you think this had to do with the pressures from the various different factions in California, and also his own problems in other parts of the country, and perhaps his not knowing how to handle a job that he had really been thrown into rather suddenly?

Shirpser: It may be. I mean, there were a few times when he was nice to work with. He was a cold, reserved sort of person, and so was Paul Butler who followed him. They didn't have the warmth that Wilson Wyatt had, for instance, who had a co-equal position with him in the Stevenson campaign. With Wilson you wanted to do the best you possibly could. He brought this out in you. For Steve you did the job because it was worth doing, not because Steve wanted it.

They were different personalities. I think that Steve went into political obscurity after he left the National Committee.

Shirpser: I did not hear of him again doing anything outstanding. I think that he now has a law practice, at least I was told this, in a rather small state. Normally, a retiring national chairman goes into a position of prestige. I don't believe Steve Mitchell did. He was too difficult. I felt badly, because I started out with the best of intentions where he was concerned, but I continued to have problems.

I would like to get to the point where John Anson Ford resigned.

Chall: Well, this in a sense leads up to it, doesn't it?

Shirpser: Yes, it does. Incidentally, John wrote to me while we were going through this hassle about our offices and he said, "I, too, have this letter from Hy. I shall do as I please on maintaining my office. The determining factor being what I believe to be in the Democratic party's best interest."

When you're working with someone like John and we had a common goal and a common opinion on this, it was a lot easier to get something done. Because John and I worked together most cooperatively.

Before we get to that I have to do a little backtracking to Senator Mike Monroney, who went on to be the chairman of the Speaker's Bureau and with whom I had such a warm, friendly, and cooperative relationship. This leads right into the election of the new national committeeman.

We, in California, planned a large Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner; it was that time of year. I asked Senator Mike Monroney to be our speaker.

An Unexpected Opportunity to Watch Senator Joseph McCarthy

Shirpser: At this time Mike Monroney was speaking out strongly against Senator Joseph McCarthy. And this took guts. It was not easy to take that man on as I learned firsthand when I went to one of the McCarthy hearings in Washington. I was very fortunate to get into that committee hearing in Washington during the National Committee meeting. I went early to the Capitol to the meeting room in which the committee hearing was to be held. There was a

Shirpser: line of people about three blocks long waiting to be admitted. I was terribly disappointed because, though I had watched it on television, I was extremely anxious to get a first-hand impression. I had never seen Joseph McCarthy in person, or Mr. Welch. Senator Scoop Jackson was on that committee, and Senator Stuart Symington, both of whom are good friends.

As I was walking away, down the hall, in distress because I knew I would never get into the committee meeting, I ran into Senator John Sparkman. He said, "You look awfully sad." And I said, "I am. I want to go to the McCarthy hearing." He said, "No problem." I said, "There's a line three blocks long!" He said, "No problem."

So, we walked right into that hearing room. The doorkeeper said, "Hello, Senator Sparkman. Glad to see you." He said, "This is my dear friend, Clara Shirpser, Democratic National Committeewoman of California. I'd like her to have a seat right in front." And I got ushered to a seat right in the front row. He saw me seated comfortably and then he had to leave.

It was one of the most terrible experiences in my life, and one of the most fascinating. You can't believe McCarthy's animal-like bellowing! Really, I was thinking afterwards that I've seen actors do a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, I've seen mad ravings on the stage, and it depresses you, of course. But it's not real life. When you saw and heard this man, out of control, yelling, screaming, "Mr. Chairman! Mr. Chairman! Mr. Chairman! Mr. Chairman!"--disrupting, standing, getting up, waving his fists, calling names....!

It was a shattering experience to see a human being so degraded, with no control of himself.

Chall: And he wasn't acting? This was his way?

Shirpser: Yes. The whole place was in an uproar! It was just like watching a mad man. That's the only thing I can say. I couldn't believe my eyes and my ears.

One thing happened that day, which was quite historical, and I was so proud of Senator Symington. One of the witnesses was an elderly Negro woman, and she was dressed neatly, but shabbily. She got on the stand, and her voice trembled so she could hardly answer. She was asked her name, where she lived, her address.

Shirpser: Then McCarthy shouted this wild question with antagonism and hatred, "You are a member of the Communist party?" She said, "Senator, I'm not a Communist. I don't even know what it means to be a Communist."

He said, "I have here the evidence!" He then read some damning charges about the meeting she had been to, and the picketing she had done. She said, in effect: "Senator, so help me God, I wasn't at any meeting. I did not walk in any picket line. Do you know what you've done to my life? I've lost all my friends. I've lost my job. I haven't got enough money to pay my rent. Why are you doing this to me? I'm not a Communist. I don't know what it means to be a Communist."

Well, she had an ordinary name like Brown or Jones or some such name. The evidence later turned out that this was a case of mistaken identity! Look how that woman was tortured! How her life was wrecked without proper investigation. She broke into tears, and she sat there sobbing. It was a dreadful thing to see a woman so crucified!

Senator Symington is a fine person with high standards, a gentleman, and a true liberal, too. He couldn't stand this. He said in effect, "Senator McCarthy, keep quiet a minute. I want to ask this witness a question. You haven't given anybody a chance. Stop bellowing and let me talk to her!"

So, the chairman recognized him and he spoke. In effect, he said, "Look, if what you're telling me is true I will help you. You understand that if I take your part it is at a great risk to myself. I'm willing to take that risk. I'm terribly sorry for you. I see what this has done to your life. I just want to ask you one question. Are you telling the truth that you've never been to a meeting of the Communist party? You've never been a Communist?" Then this is the gist of what followed:

She said, "So help me God, Senator, I am not and I never have been." So, he said, "I will get you a job. I will promise you that your rent will be paid. I will not let this happen to a citizen of the United States in a democracy like ours. I believe you." Senator Symington did not know, when he came to her defense, that this would turn out to be a case of mistaken identity.

You're not supposed to applaud, but people stood up and cheered and clapped! I was so proud of him. I thought that Senator Symington's courage was wonderful. The contrast was

Shirpsen: great, between his quiet and forceful way of speaking and the raving and ranting of Senator McCarthy. It was a never-to-be-forgotten experience.

Mike Monroney and the Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner

Shirpsen: Later, when Mike Monroney had spoken against McCarthy and the harm that he had done in the Senate, I knew that this would be a very popular stand in California, where we had so much trouble with the Un-American Activities Committee and what they had done to us up and down the state. So, I asked Mike to be a speaker at the Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner, and I told him that I thought it would be a very popular thing to reiterate some of the things he had said about McCarthyism and expand on them. He accepted my invitation, and he gave us a very good title for his speech, "Backwards Walks the Elephant."

Incidentally, before we leave McCarthy, I never could understand General Eisenhower. During the 1952 campaign, General Marshall was being vilified by McCarthy. General Marshall was the man who "made" Dwight Eisenhower, who exerted such influence and pressure to make Dwight Eisenhower the Commander-in-Chief, and yet he [Eisenhower] let McCarthy speak on the rear platform of Ike's campaign train. He listened to McCarthy make these terrible charges against General Marshall. And he never took up the cudgels, as far as I know, for General Marshall.

Senator Mike Monroney arrived, and when he came it was always a happy time for me. I met him at the airport, and I sat next to him at the head table at the Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner. I spoke to welcome him. I had invited him and spoke so highly of him and of my experiences with him. He wrote on my program, and when I sat down I saw, "To my favorite Democratic National Committeewoman--Mike Monroney."

I said, "Thank you so very much. You know, I have material for blackmail here. If I ever tell your national committeewoman from Oklahoma what you wrote!" He said, "I know you won't." And I said, "Of course, I won't." But I was delighted that he had done this voluntarily.

Going through my scrapbook I note that William Roth was the dinner chairman. Without telling me (I thought this was a

Shirpser: wonderful thing for them to do), William Blake, who was a member of the dinner committee, and also was chairman of the San Francisco County Central Committee, wrote a letter to William Roth, and recommended that when the proceeds of the dinner were allocated that "\$1000 be given to our fine national committeewoman, Clara Shirpser, who has had to maintain a separate office."

This was really official party support. I had been on the Alameda County Central Committee, but they didn't do this. In San Francisco where I had worked in my office there, and they knew what I was doing, and I had a good relationship with them, they thought enough of me to recommend that.

It wasn't done. Anyway, I thought that was a wonderful thing for them to have recommended. It meant a great deal to me.

I had good relationships with the labor groups. George Johns, George Hardy, Jack Goldberger, William Kilpatrick, Marie deGrassi, and Jennie Matyas were all prominent labor leaders. All these people cooperated with me.

It was good for me to have that labor support, which was Elizabeth Snyder's main source of support in Southern California. John Despol, in Southern California, helped me with my office by putting the Committee to Abolish Cross-Filing in my office. This labor support was fine. Once I was able to repay them a little. Mr. Truman was coming for an official Democratic dinner, and an organized-labor group were having a conference in the Fairmont Hotel on the same night. They wanted Harry Truman to make an appearance, and they turned to me to get him for them.

I called Mr. Truman and got his okay, and brought him into the statewide labor dinner, where he received a standing ovation. He only stayed for a few minutes and said a few words, but to have him there meant so much to them. Of course, he had close affiliation with organized labor. These relationships are often two-way streets, and I was glad I could help in this way.

Once, when Hubert Humphrey was trying to make up a campaign deficit, the San Francisco Labor Council committee asked me who I thought would be a good person for them to have at a dinner meeting. And I said, "Hubert Humphrey."

They invited him, and they gave him a good fee, and he was grateful to me. Being in control of getting speakers at the national level, and knowing these people, you can accomplish some good things sometimes.

Paul Ziffren's Election as National Committeeman for California

Shirpser: Well, here we had this happy evening and the next morning at nine o'clock the election of a new national committeeman was scheduled. It was to be done, legally, by the Executive Committee of the State Central Committee.

Prior to this I had received a telephone call from John Anson Ford, and then his letter of resignation, which was such a blow to me. We had worked together so well. We sent each other copies of letters we wrote to Washington. We conferred with each other when a senator or top official was coming to California so that we could schedule his activities and share the expenses of his tour. When John came to San Francisco he was always with me and with Ad, often in our home. He and his wife were so warm and hospitable to Ad and me when we came to Southern California.

I thought, "This is the last straw! I don't know what I'm going to do." George Miller came to me, and he said, "I want to talk over the situation of the new Democratic National Committeeman with you. He's going to be elected from Southern California. It's their problem. You're from the North and the national committeeman must come from the South. Will you take some advice from me?"

I said, "I'd like to." He said, "I give you my word, I'll stay neutral if you'll stay neutral. Now, it's terribly important to you to be able to work with the new national committeeman who is elected. The two chief contenders, as you know, are Tom Carrell and Paul Ziffren. My inclination, if I took a stand, probably would be to support Paul Ziffren. I think I have a lot of influence with the executive committee. I know you have, too, and because Tom Carrell was chairman of the Kefauver delegation, and because he's a good friend of yours, and you don't know Paul Ziffren, you probably would come out for Tom. And we'd have a terrible battle. There would be a lot of animosities and antagonisms aroused. Why don't you and I stay out of it? Let Southern California have the battle, and if you'll stay out of it, I will."

I said, "I think that's a fine idea. I'll give you my word." And he said, "I'll give you my word."

Chall: You've been through this before, I think.

Shirpser: Never as blatantly as this. As I look back--we were working together well by then, and we had lost a great deal of the hostility that existed between us. His plan of neutrality sounded like a sensible idea to me.

After all, he was so much more experienced in politics than I. I'd only been in the office for a year. This seemed to me the wise thing to do.

So, when Tom Carrell called me asking for my support, I explained the situation to him. I said, "Tom, even from your point of view, I think you're better off. If George comes out for Paul Ziffren, the way he organizes things, and it is the State Central Executive Committee who is doing it, I don't think you'd have as good a chance as if he stays neutral and I stay neutral. I don't know Paul Ziffren. My wish is to support you. You've always been so loyal to me. If I were doing it just for my sake I wouldn't stay neutral, but honestly I think you're better off, too."

He said, "I accept that. I think that makes sense." Then, Paul Ziffren called me, saying, how much he admired me, and how much he respected me, and what a wonderful job I was doing; how he would look forward to working with me; all of this flattery, which was a little too much for sincerity. He also asked mutual friends to phone me in his behalf. For example, Dave Friedenrich and Jack Tolan. I told them that I was going to be neutral, and I also explained that George had asked me to be neutral and that he promised that he would be neutral, and that the decision would be made by the Southern California delegates. While we would all vote, we would respect what the Southern California delegates wanted.

Then, friends started calling me. They kept telling me, "But it's so important for you, Clara, to have someone you can work with. You know you can work with Tom Carrell. You don't know anything about Ziffren." He was not well known at that time, at least, to me and to people in Northern California.

I would explain to everybody that I thought that by staying neutral as would George Miller, it was the strategic thing to do, and it was also probably better for Tom Carrell.

The Monroney dinner ended and Ad and I went home.

Chall: This was the Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner?

Shirpser: Yes.

Chall: Could you just fill in when is that usually? What month?

Shirpser: I have the program here because I checked it recently. I know the program with Mike's autograph is here; it was October.

Chall: So, actually there wouldn't have been too many months between the time of the resignation and the new appointment. It was fairly soon.

Shirpser: Yes. It was within thirty to sixty days. I believe the meeting of the new national committeeman was called for nine the next morning.

Chall: It would have taken place here in San Francisco?

Shirpser: Yes, at the Fairmont Hotel. We planned to get there early and be ready for the meeting. Seven o'clock the next morning I got a phone call from Tom Carrell. He said that after I had left the previous evening George Miller took Paul Ziffren up and down the Fairmont Hotel, calling groups of delegates together, members of the executive committee, and telling all of them that he was for Paul Ziffren, and urging them to elect Paul Ziffren.

Now, this was one of the dirtiest tricks that has ever happened to me in my life! I followed George's advice. He made the proposition that he would stay neutral if I stayed neutral. I stayed with it. I have often wondered what inducement Paul Ziffren gave him to make him break his word to me. It had to be something very big and very important to make George Miller face me the next day with the knowledge that he had broken his word to me, and without letting me know! If he had come to me and said, 'Look, I've changed my mind. I'm going to support Paul Ziffren, you are free to do what you want,' I would have stayed at the Fairmont Hotel that night, and I would have worked for Tom Carrell! But, I didn't find out until seven o'clock the next morning.

I said to Tom, 'Why didn't you call me?' He said, 'Well, I didn't want to wake you up in the middle of the night. You're way over in Berkeley. But for God's sake get over here now.'

Well, we flew into our clothes. I think we had a cup of coffee and we were at the Fairmont Hotel within an hour. I couldn't find many delegates. Everybody was dressing, or still in bed, or eating breakfast, or taking a walk. I longed to get

Shirpser: in touch with my friends and tell them what had happened, and I know that I could have influenced many votes for Tom Carrell if I could have reached my friends on that committee.

I thought that I couldn't get up in the middle of an open meeting of the executive committee and tell them what had really happened. Maybe I should have. I've often regretted that I didn't.

Chall: I think anything goes in these meetings.

Shirpser: It just seemed to me that it would then become such a controversy and such a personality clash because many people knew of my problems with George Miller when we shared an office. I feared that it might be thought that I was making this up out of resentment or George might have denied that he ever made that promise to me. I don't know what he would have been capable of doing.

Chall: Did you speak to him and ask him what happened?

Shirpser: Afterwards I did, and he said, "I changed my mind." I said, "You didn't feel the obligation to let me know? You were the one who made the proposition to stay neutral. You were the one who asked me to stay neutral. I followed your advice. You didn't feel any responsibility to tell me that you changed your mind?" "No." I replied, "This was a truly dirty trick to break your word to me, and not have the decency to let me know that you would support Ziffren, in which case I would have supported Carrell. How many times have you broken your word to me, when I have kept my promise to you?"

There has to have been some very strong inducement. I have a good idea of what it was, but naturally I can't say. I do know that Paul Ziffren had open house, and wined and dined every one of the delegates all through that night. I've heard many stories of the inducements he offered. I don't know if it's true, so I can't say it. It's customary to entertain the delegates. But I think he went farther than anyone I've ever known.

Chall: Do you think that this was one, his way of making sure that he got what he wanted, but two, that he may have felt that Tom Carrell had more support than he had expected and at the last minute this push was necessary?

Shirpser: Your guess is as good as mine. I only know the facts. Why would George change his mind that way? Friends of mine like

Shirpser: Jack Tolan and Dave Friedenrich who had called me for Ziffren thought George's action was shocking. They could hardly believe that he would do this to me.

The meeting took place. They both spoke. Paul Ziffren is a much better speaker than Tom Carrell. The vote was taken. I believe Ziffren won by about forty-eight to twenty-seven. Tom Carrell was gallant enough to get up and to pledge his support to Paul Ziffren and to say that he would work with him in the best interests of the party.

And it really was sad that Tom should have been treated that way. I always felt guilty.

Chall: How did Tom Carrell feel about you?

Shirpser: Tom Carrell understood. When he called me, he said, "I know what George Miller promised you. He told me himself he would stay neutral." George had told Tom that, too, you see. He said, "I know what he's done, but get over here right away" (the early morning of the election meeting). Well, I tried, but it was too late.

You know, the publicity that Paul Ziffren has gotten has made problems. For instance, the Chronicle's article regarding the election of the national committeeman said, "Paul Ziffren, close associate in Chicago of Illinois Democratic Boss, Jake Arvey..." You know, this was his background. The way we function in California is so completely different--no ward bosses.

From the beginning Paul Ziffren was a focal point for controversy. In spite of all the problems I inherited, I think he went out and looked for them. I just tried to cope with what happened to me, but he really made problems for himself. I have letter after letter asking him to resign; copies sent to me from the congressional districts. There's a letter from the Sixty-sixth Congressional District criticizing him strongly, and urging his resignation.

The next thing that happened was that the National Committee met in Washington, and many letters of protest went to the Credentials Committee of the Democratic National Committee. I was on that committee. You can imagine what a temptation it was for me to tell them what had happened!

In the meantime, some of the Kefauver delegates called a caucus, and they were protesting this election as illegal.

Shirpser: Because they said that the Democratic National Committeeman and National Committeewoman were chosen by the Kefauver delegates, and Paul Ziffren had been on the opposite slate. They didn't think it was fair or just to have a man who wasn't a Kefauver delegate, because Kefauver had won.

Well, Tom urged them to drop it. When I appraised Estes of the situation, he wrote to his former delegates asking them to drop it because he said that there was no question as to the legality of this election. The state executive committee has a right to elect a national committeeman.

Here I was faced with this dilemma: Cal Rawlings, who was chairman of the Credentials Committee and a good friend, turned to me and said, "Clara, tell us what really happened. And tell us what you think about the whole situation. We've gotten many, many letters which disturb us. Tell us." I said, "I long to tell you, and I'm terribly tempted to tell you. But Paul Ziffren was legally elected, and I have to be loyal to the laws of the Democratic National Committee and to the State Central Committee whose executive committee elected Paul Ziffren. That's all I can say."

Cal Rawlings asked, "What do you think of him?" I said, "No comment. I hardly know him, but I will try my best to work with him."

That, I think, was the only course I could take. Believe me, it was difficult. Because I think if I had told of the way he got elected and the machinations that went on, added to the protests they had already gotten from congressional districts and county chairmen, they might have--I don't know. I thought, "Well, he is the legally elected national committeeman." So I kept quiet in the Credentials Committee meeting. I guess it does prove that I can keep quiet; [laughter] once in a while, anyway.

Committee to Plan a Mid-Term Convention

Shirpser: Just prior to the time that I got criticized by Mitchell about my office, I was asked to go on a mid-term convention committee, which was a good idea, I thought. Paul Butler had introduced that resolution, and Mitchell appointed two different committees. One of them was a committee chiefly of congressmen.

Chall: All right. You want to talk about the mid-term convention. Can you give me the date and the place of that?

Shirpser: I was appointed to the committee May 15, 1953.

Chall: To arrange for the mid-term convention?

Shirpser: Yes. I have a clipping about it. On the committee, there were ten governors, six national committeemen, and four national committeewomen.

You see, this was just about par for the course. Sixteen men and four women.

Chall: Who had been invited? Was this a western group?

Shirpser: No. It was national.

Chall: And, yet, only a very small number?

Shirpser: Four women. Martha Ragland and I were two of the women. I have the clipping if you want to know who was on the committee. There were governors from North, South, East, West.

My reaction to the mid-term convention was favorable. I could see several good things coming out of it. Between conventions there are four years. If you have a mid-term convention after two years have passed, you can evaluate the performance of the party in office, you can point up the vital issues, you can get information to the people in this regard, you can bring the party platform up to date, if it appears necessary. One of the things that motivated me was that the party in power has such tremendous television and radio coverage, and newspaper coverage. The Democratic party never has the funds to begin to equal it. So this mid-term convention would give exposure to our stand on issues, which I thought was the most important thing. We would get television, radio, and news coverage, because this would be a new idea. It was bound to create a great deal of interest. We could start getting good publicity to a nationwide audience for candidates who were interested in running in 1956.

I could see many good reasons for doing this. But the Congressional Committee, which Mitchell also appointed, took a very dim view of it. They felt it would take the edge off of the national convention. They thought that it would cost too much money to put it on.

Shirpsr: I'm sure that any city in which we held the mid-term convention would have, as they do for the convention, given us a substantial sum to carry the expenses.

I don't think we ever met until we came a day early before the Democratic National Committee meeting in Washington. We were doing some corresponding back and forth; occasionally, a phone call, but our committee liaison was ineffective.

It's surprising to me that with so many good people on these committees so little was done. Evidently, the more-experienced people in the party didn't like it. You know, they often resist new ideas. Particularly, the Congressional Committee was opposed. I was for it, and gave out several press releases, which got good coverage. But, the solution that came up was to have regional conferences instead.

One in the North, in the South, in the East, and in the West. That way they didn't have nearly the impact that a national conference would have. But, at least, we were doing something constructive, and they served a useful purpose. But it was a disappointment to me, and I know it was to Paul Butler, the maker of the motion, because he believed in it, wholeheartedly.

Chall: Now, this would have been a mid-term convention, like a national nominating convention of all the delegates?

Shirpsr: Yes. It would have been issue oriented though, rather than for nominating candidates. Except, you obviously would bring your best people there to speak. So they would get some national exposure there, too.

National Committee Meetings

Chall: Did the National Committee, itself, meet often between conventions?

Shirpsr: Oh yes. We met, at least, three times a year. And we met in various parts of the country. We met in Washington, usually, or Chicago because those were more central places. But once we met in Miami. Once we had a marvelous meeting in New Orleans. That was more enjoyable than anything I've done in my life, I think. I can't remember a National Committee meeting taking

Shirpser: place in the West. You know, it was too far for the easterners and for the senators and congressmen to come West, I suppose. So, Washington was the place where we usually preferred to go because then you could confer with the senators and the congressmen and the Speakers' Bureau and the Rules Committee. You could get a lot done in Washington while you were there for a National Committee meeting.

Of course, the headquarters for the National Committee is in Washington. I think I showed you a typical agenda where Senator Lyndon Johnson, who was the Majority Leader, invited us to breakfast at the Capitol. But we weren't invited to the White House during my four year term because there was a Republican administration there.

After the morning session, we'd break for lunch and we'd usually have a big lunch meeting of the National Committee members, together with speakers. Before the dinner meetings, there were always cocktail parties. Washington was an exciting place to go.

Chall: Maybe we can take this up another time; I just would like to know what was carried on in meetings three times a year by the National Committee? What were they working on?

Shirpser: Each time it was different. Sometimes it was policy matters. Now, the first one in March, in '54, they had several new National Committee members to introduce to the Credentials Committee. There were six, I believe, at the time. And the Credentials Committee accepted every one of them. They usually do, unless there is a very definitive reason why they shouldn't.

But sometimes it's on the issues. Always we discussed and planned for fund raising. There were always organizational matters, of course. I think, if we go through some typical agendas we can get a better view. Much depended on whether there was an election going on. This influenced which speakers had talked to us. We would focus all the attention we could, naturally, on congressional candidates, and governors. These National Committee meetings served a very useful purpose as well as being enjoyable.

One of the main things was: we got to know each other, and to learn how to work together.

Adlai Stevenson Visits San Francisco

Shirpser: Adlai made a visit to California, which was a very happy time for me, as it always was when Adlai was here. In March of 1953 he came to San Francisco on his way to the Orient. He went by ship on the S.S. President Wilson, on which I've had the pleasure of having a couple of trips. He was on his way to the Orient, Korea, the Near East, and Western Europe. William Blair was with him, as always, and Barry Bingham, who was publisher of the Louisville Courier Journal, and Walter Johnson from the University of Chicago, history department, who now is in the University of Hawaii, compiling the official eight books of Adlai Stevenson's papers. I will send him some Xerox copies of letters, clippings, programs, etc. which he wants.

We conferred and decided that, since we usually had \$100 dinners when he was here, that it would be a good idea to have a reception that was open to the public. This was not a good idea because the crowd of people who came was almost unbelievable.

Timothy Ives, his nephew, was along. Timothy was in uniform, and if he hadn't literally held me up, putting his arms around me, and if the Secret Service men hadn't been around Adlai, we would have been knocked down and trampled on. It got out of control completely.

Chall: Where was it?

Shirpser: At the Fairmont Hotel in the Grand Ballroom, which is a big room. But they were coming through back entrances, through the kitchen. They were coming down side halls. They were coming in every direction. It really was panicky. I had never been in a mob like that before where you just can't keep on your feet, and everybody is yelling. Adlai had buttons pulled off his coat. It was just dreadful.

I don't know how we ever got out of there. Adlai said, "Never again anything like this." It was frightening. It wasn't safe. Anything could have happened.

Chall: This was a free-for-all? Anybody could come and shake hands with Adlai Stevenson?

Shirpser: Yes. Finally, somebody erected some kind of box for him to stand on, and he was able to make a short speech. I think a "mike" was produced, too. Then a flying phalanx of guards

Shirpsen: surrounded him to get him out of there.

Then we went to the ship. George Killion was having a party aboard ship. India and I rode with Adlai and Bill, which was such a pleasure. When we got to the gangplank there was another crowd. One girl rushed up to Adlai and threw her arms around Adlai and kissed him. He loathed this kind of thing, and so did Bill.

This whole event was not of my planning. The State Central Committee had arranged that "mob" scene, and thought it was a good idea. But it was done in good faith. I thought that Adlai should have had more protection, both at the Fairmont Hotel and at the gangplank of the ship. But no one had anticipated such a crowd.

I had knitted a scarf for Adlai, which I gave him as he was leaving. I knew that they were going into cold weather. Adlai wrote me a couple of wonderful cards from the trip. The first one was, "My neck is the envy of all my traveling companions. I imagine I will lose the scarf before the trip is over." Another time he wrote me during the trip, telling me some of his experiences and he ended with, "Keep the fires burning."

I answered with what I intended to be a humorous letter telling him that I could interpret that in many ways, and I wasn't sure just what he wanted burned down. But I interpreted it as meaning, after doing a lot of thinking, that he wanted me to keep the home fires burning for the Democratic party.

Adlai always had such a quick wit. On the first picture he ever gave me he wrote "To Clara, with an amateur's thanks," after the 1952 election. If he were an amateur, I surely wanted to be included in that category. It was always the unexpected with Adlai, which made friendship with him a delightful experience.

I think it may have been during this time that he received a blueberry pie. Did I tell you about that?

Chall: I don't think so.

Shirpsen: When he was making speeches in '52, he once said, "...as American as blueberry pie." From there on blueberry pies kept arriving as gifts to him. In that picture I'm standing in the background, trying my best not to giggle, while he's being gracious to this woman who is handing him a home-baked blueberry pie. I knew that

Shirpser: the minute she left that he'd hand me the pie and say get rid of it." That seemed to be one of my duties as national committeewoman, too. He didn't even like blueberry pie. He didn't even say he did. But he said that it was "as American as blueberry pie."

Shall we talk about the parades, or do you want to go on to the Condon-Mitchell letter?

Chall: Well, I'd rather... Didn't you introduce that parade resolution at the '56 convention?

Shirpser: And the '60 convention. I continued to try.

Paul Ziffren as National Committeeman

Chall: I'd rather take these things up--as far as possible when they come chronologically. We really should stay with the 1954, primarily the 1954 election, I think, would be just fine. Once we get Ziffren in place,

I would like to ask you, though, about your ability to cooperate and get along with Ziffren. I saw some letters that were in the folder. And it would seem that he was very intelligent, and well organized when he wrote you letters on the great need to develop organizational plans for the party.

Shirpser: Oh yes, he is intelligent and well organized.

Chall: And if he had been just that, a good organizer, and able to work to promote the party it would seem to me that there was no reason why he couldn't have succeeded. Maybe he did succeed, as a matter of fact. But then there are all these other bits of material which indicate that he might have been a corrupt person. What was the problem between you?

Shirpser: Well, in the beginning I tried to do what I'd done with John. I sent him carbon copies of all the letters I wrote to Steve. And when I knew anyone was coming to California, and was coming through Northern California, I always got in touch with him.

He got embroiled in many fights with the Dime-a-day for Democracy group. He was hostile to Liz Snyder, and to other

Shirpser: good and established Democratic leaders, particularly in Southern California. I kept hearing that it was hard to work with him--that he never asked anybody. You got the idea that he couldn't care less what you thought about anything. Many thought that self-interest was the dominating factor in his operations.

He entertained lavishly, and had a beautiful home, and a very attractive wife. To the people who went along with him, life must have been made very pleasant. But if you had a different idea, or you wanted to do something that you thought was right and he didn't, then he gave you a bad time.

In the beginning we were both trying, I think, to work together. But, then, came 1954. Remember, he was only elected in November, I think it was, of '53. And then we come to 1954.

Clara's Role in the Robert Condon-James Roosevelt-Steve Mitchell Controversy

Shirpser: Robert Condon, who was congressman from, I believe, the Sixth Congressional District in the Contra Costa area, had a very good record as a liberal congressman. He had strong labor support. He was a good friend and ally of George Miller and Bert Coffey.

In view of what happened later I must say that I didn't know Robert Condon well. He never bothered much about me. I got the feeling that he thought I was just someone to be endured, rather than someone he wanted to work with. Even when I was in Washington I received no courtesies from him.

What I did later when I came strongly to his aid wasn't because of friendship. It was because of principle. In May of 1953, I believe, Bob Condon, along with other congressmen, had sent in a request to the Atomic Energy Committee to visit and to inspect an AEC site but the authorities refused to let him come.

Chall: This is one of those experimental things out in the Pacific Ocean?

Shirpser: Yes, probably. I don't remember the location of it. This happened in 1953. When he demanded an explanation for this, he was told that a witness for the Un-American Activities Committee

Shirpser: had said that in 1948 a Bob Condon had attended a closed meeting of a Communist party.

Now, the witness did not say that Bob was a Communist. He said that he had attended this meeting. That was six years previously. Bob was not holding a political office then. Bob Condon denied immediately, with a strong statement, that he had ever been a member of the Communist party and said he had never attended a Communist meeting.

Well, a lot of fear was expressed in California because at the time he was denied clearance, many people were terribly worried about what would happen to the Democratic party if such a charge against an incumbent California congressman would prove to be true.

When I was next in Washington, about this time, I spoke to some of the senators and congressmen whom I knew well. I even went to see Sam Rayburn because he was the top man in the House of Representatives. I knew he was anti-Communist, and I was afraid that he would do something to hurt Bob. I was trying to find out the truth, and what to do and how to do it.

Chall: This was in the McCarthy's heyday? This was both the fear and the manipulation that was being used against people.

Shirpser: Yes. We were worried about what would happen. Obviously, when grave charges are made against a congressmen, it's not a good background from which to run a campaign for reelection.

Well, I have here a letter that I wrote to Sam Rayburn on September 24, 1953, in which I thanked him for his advice and help in this problem which was of great concern to the Democratic party in California, and perhaps nationally. I told him that I appreciated his interest and the opportunity to work with him. And Cap Harding, who had been the chairman of the Congressional Campaign Committee, told me the result of his conference with George Miller, Jr.

"It is now my understanding that George will urge Bob to testify before the Joint Atomic Energy Committee. Surely, we all hope that there will be a positive clearance for Bob."

This is what a great many people wanted. Sam Rayburn wanted this, too. He said that he would stand with Bob if he would go before the Atomic Energy Committee, ask for an interview, waive his congressional immunity, and answer all questions.

Shirpser: This made him subject to all charges, and the penalties, if the charges were proved. If Bob were willing to do that then Mr. Sam would support him all the way.

I didn't know Bob well enough to influence him, but I tried to do it through people I did know. I was awfully glad when George did talk to Mr. Sam, and Mr. Sam convinced him that this was the only thing Bob could do. (I had previously given Mr. Sam the information he wanted and needed) He had to go before that committee and waive his congressional immunity and testify and try to clear his name. That is actually what did happen.

Another thing that Mr. Sam said was that he did not think Bob had to appear before any other congressional investigating committee, including the Un-American Activities Committee, which was going to visit California soon. I told him that I would be grateful for any other further advice from him, and anything that I could do to help in this situation I would be delighted to do. At the end I said, "Please excuse my bad typing. I didn't want to entrust this information to one of my volunteers. When I became Democratic National Committeewoman I did not realize that the first prerequisite is a course in typing. In the Democratic party, that is. My Republican counterpart can afford a paid secretary, which is provided for her by the Republican party."

Bob went before the Atomic Energy Committee, and he answered every question. Sam Rayburn told me he went with him. Had Bob Condon not been willing to do this Mr. Sam would have repudiated him. Since Bob did answer every question with complete frankness and factual information, and he denied that he was a Communist, I thought Bob showed courage.

After Bob testified there was a pre-primary convention of the CDC in Bob's district. This was one of the main functions of the CDC because the county committees could not endorse, especially where there was a contest. Bob and the man contesting for the office of congressman for that district both went before the district convention of clubs. I had written down that Bob was unanimously endorsed. I doubt that this could be true. There must have been some votes for the other man or he wouldn't have run. So, let's just say that he had a large majority.

Jimmy Roosevelt decided to run in Southern California. There were runors at the time he announced that he would seek election as a congressman that there would be a sensational divorce suit, filed by his wife. I saw Jimmy at a meeting, and

Shirpser: he voluntarily talked to me about this. What he told me was in confidence, so I don't feel free to repeat it. But what he said publicly later, I think, should be explored at this point. In this Harpers article, which we'll come to eventually, there is something about Jimmy's wife. I'm sure she was a sick woman. I'm sure that she was neurotic. She did have a nervous breakdown after the divorce.

[Interview 10, February 14, 1973]

Shirpser: I found a letter from Bob Condon later--The Sacramento Bee took a strong stand against what Steve Mitchell did. When the letter came out it was months later. The letter did not immediately follow the Atomic Energy hearing. Months went by, and after the pre-primary district conventions at which both Bob Condon and Jimmy Roosevelt had been endorsed, the Mitchell letter to Paul Ziffren was written.

I knew nothing about this letter--no copy was sent to me. I was awakened early one morning by a call from the Washington Post. The first question was, "What do you think of Mitchell's letter? And Paul Ziffren, did he write to you, too?" I answered: "I don't know what you're talking about."

They said, "Do you mean to say that Steve Mitchell, the national chairman, wrote to one member of the National Committee and bypassed the other in the same state?" I said, "Evidently he did."

The reporter asked: "Do you know what's in the letter?" I said, "I have no idea what's in the letter. Will you please read it to me?"

So, he read it to me, and I got more and more outraged as this letter went on. At the end of it I burst out with, "I believe that one of the major strengths of democracy is that we believe a man is innocent until he is proved guilty! I do not understand how the national chairman could dare to come into this state and tell the voters of California that they don't know what they're doing! These two men were endorsed by their own districts. I'm positive that they will not be intimidated by Mr. Mitchell's letter, and they will continue to run. I will do my best to support them!"

Shirpser: This got front page coverage in the Washington Post. Before I had a chance to have a cup of coffee, the New York Times reporter was on the phone with the same questions, and they, too, featured what I said.

Chall: How did they have wind of the letter?

Shirpser: I don't know. I suppose maybe Ziffren gave it publicity. I've never known. Or Steve Mitchell might have given a copy of it to the press.

Think of the insulting treatment of me and of the office I held. That Steve would write only to Paul in my state, where I had been so active; and I had worked with Steve for two years. He knew what I was capable of doing, but he simply bypassed me in this derogatory way! It was an insult that very few National Committee chairmen have ever given to an active National Committee member.

I think the fact that I was a woman entered into his thinking. He wanted to work with the man, who would, of course, be the most important person in the state.

Then the Sacramento Bee called and others of the local press, the UP and the AP--this is interesting. I kept asking: "What is Roger Kent saying? What is George Miller saying?" The answer was: "We can't find them. They're not available. We have not been able to reach one Democratic official who has a statewide position, or a position for Northern California or Southern California. You're the only one who will talk to us."

I said, "Well, I'll continue to say what I've been saying, emphasizing that a man is innocent until he is proved guilty, and the CDC district conventions endorsed both Roosevelt and Condon. Now I'm going to phone both Steve Mitchell and Paul Ziffren and ask them to justify their conduct."

Chall: Now, could I ask you what the letter said?

Shirpser: The letter said, in effect--and I have some quotes from it which I'll give--"...though, it was up to the people of California to choose their candidates, the National Committee was not obligated to support them with funds if they did not consider them the type of candidates they wanted to support."

This was untrue! The National Committee has never in history supported one Democratic candidate in the primary when

Shirpser: another Democratic candidate is running against him. They're forbidden by law to do this, or by their own rules.

Eleanor Roosevelt, later, wrote me a wonderful letter, thanking me for my courage in supporting her son, Jimmy, and she stated the same thing as I did, that Steve Mitchell was raising a false issue about not wanting to send funds to support Roosevelt and Condon, because he could not send funds to one Democratic candidate against another in the primary. Mrs. Roosevelt said some harsh things about Steve Mitchell.

Some of the things said editorially by various newspapers were that Mitchell was taking a page out of Joe McCarthy's book, and damning a man by guilt association.

Well, letters starting pouring in to me, and the press reaction to my statement was most favorable. Then, many noted that no other Democratic leaders were willing to be quoted, and that I immediately did speak out. What do you think? They couldn't reach these Democratic officials for about twenty-four hours. Then, when the press reports came out, and they saw that I was getting excellent coverage, and editorial support for my stand, then everybody got in the act and they said much the same thing I had said. Then, all of them criticized Mitchell most harshly, as I had previously.

I phoned Steve Mitchell, and I said, "I protest this! I'm going to bring it up in the next National Committee meeting! I want to know by what right you came into my state without consulting me and did not write to me at the same time you wrote to Paul. And I also want to know if you polled the members of the executive committee."

He said, "No. It was a personal statement, and had nothing to do with the National Committee." I said, "You cannot possibly speak as an individual when you're chairman of the Democratic National Committee! I intend to ask time to come before the executive committee at the next meeting"--which was in the near future--"and explain to them what you did and the repercussions in California."

Then I called Paul Ziffren. I asked him, "Was this the cooperation you pledged to me? Was this the kind of working together arrangement that you had said you were looking forward to doing? How dare you receive a letter like that, which did not say on the bottom, carbon copy to Clara Shirpser, and not call me immediately and ask me what I thought?"

Shirpser: "Oh," he said, "I was sure Mitchell had sent you a letter!" I said, "It did not say carbon copy to Clara Shirpser, so you knew he hadn't sent me a letter. You owed it to me to let me know. I told you how John and I had always worked together, sending each other copies. I'm outraged at your conduct and I think it's deplorable that you and Mitchell worked this out together. I'm also deeply opposed to the contents of that letter."

Chall: What did he have to say--not just about the fact that you had been ignored, but the principle of the action?

Shirpser: It took me at least twenty-four to forty-eight hours to get through to him. By then, I was delighted to tell him the favorable reaction I was getting--by phone and wires and letters. Even a group of doctors from Kaiser Permanente Hospital wrote to me, telling me that their faith in democracy was strengthened by my courage, and they realized that I was the only one speaking out in the beginning. This really gave me great satisfaction.

Of course, I got a few crank letters, too, calling me a Communist. The dirty letters people will send you unsigned are just deplorable. The great bulk of them praised my principles and courage. Of course I received marvelous letters of thanks from Bob Condon and Jimmy Roosevelt and people in their districts. Did I tell you that Jimmy sent me his father's favorite picture, autographed by his father to him?

Chall: Yes.

Shirpser: Well, at any rate, you asked me about Paul. When they contacted him and asked him for his opinion he said that he had nothing to say about Condon. One of the reporters told me that they asked him, "Won't you even say, as Clara Shirpser is saying, that a man is innocent until he's proved guilty?" He said, "No comment."

So, this professed liberal wasn't even willing to go that far. Then, when they asked Ziffren about Roosevelt he said that he didn't think that seeking public office was the place to air your domestic problems. Well, obviously, Jimmy was not airing his domestic problems. His neurotic wife was doing this to harm him when he was seeking the congressional seat.

Naturally, this is not a good background from which to run. He had signed that "confession" as his wife demanded. His wife had promised him that if he would sign it she would not make it

Shirpser: public. Then she broke her promise and gave the signed letter to the press. I'm sure that she wasn't thinking sanely at the time she did all this.

This statement came back to haunt Paul Ziffren. He could not go into Jimmy's district again and be welcomed. When Professor Harris from Southern California came up to interview me (he wrote about me and about Paul Ziffren when he was writing the history of California politics), he said that Paul told him that he had made a terrible mistake in saying that about Jimmy Roosevelt.

Many feared that we were going to be given bad national publicity by a candidate who had been called a Communist, and by a man who was involved in a sensational divorce.

Naturally, everyone wished that weren't true. But Robert Condon was an incumbent congressman with a good voting record. His people wrote to me immediately. They wanted Mitchell to be censured by the National Committee, and they wanted me to introduce that motion. A copy of the strongest possible letter to Paul Ziffren from the chairman of the Contra Costa Democratic Committee was sent to me.

Chall: Asking him to resign, as I recall.

Shirpser: Yes. I think that my conduct during this crisis was one of the best things I did during my term of office. Because I did it without weighing what it might do to me. Later, several senators told me that they thought I might have gone too far, and wasn't I thinking what it might do to my own career? Suppose Condon did turn out to be a Communist? And I said that I had to accept his word, especially after he went before the Atomic Energy Committee and waived his immunity. I had to believe that he was telling the truth. If he didn't, and people wanted to punish me for believing that a man under oath was telling the truth, then they could do it.

But, it was taking a big risk and I realized this. But, it didn't occur to me that I could do anything else. I didn't want to say, "No comment." There was a vital issue at stake if you believe in democracy, and I do.

Chall: Had Condon been cleared by the AEC?

Shirpser: I believe that he was. I'm sure they didn't find any real evidence that he had been a Communist. They must have cleared him, or, at

Shirpser: least, the ban was lifted.

What happened in his district was really tragic. Enormous ads were put in by the Republican party saying, "The chairman of the Democratic National Committee, the head of Mr. Condon's own political party has said, in effect, that Mr. Condon is not fit to hold public office." Even so, he only lost by twenty-five hundred votes.

And money poured in from the Republican party to use the same sort of smear on television and radio. It was a bitter blow for Robert Condon to be defeated by these tactics. Financially, he's better off now, in his private law practice, I've heard.

Many people, to make up for the way he had been crucified, gave him new law business. As I told you, we hadn't been good friends in the past. I didn't mean to say that I didn't like him, but I just didn't know him well. He was so close to Miller, and with all the problems I was having, you know, it didn't lead to a cordial relationship with Bob. They had a big dinner in his district in my honor and praised me, and realized that I had really come to his defense when it took courage.

I went into his district and campaigned for him during his election. I did everything I could for him.

Chall: He won the primary?

Shirpser: Oh yes.

Chall: But he lost the general?

Shirpser: Yes, unfortunately. Bob Condon stated (I have it someplace among my notes) that he had been conferring with Mitchell for two weeks previous to that letter, and that he had told Mitchell everything that Mitchell wanted to know, that Mitchell had not said one word about sending such a letter to Paul Ziffren and giving it to the press. Condon censured him in the strongest words, among which he used the word "cowardly."

It does seem most unfair that he was conferring with him right up to the time that Mitchell wrote that letter. And Mitchell didn't inform him that he was sending that letter.

I don't understand Steve Mitchell's conduct. I got a very nice statement from Adlai Stevenson regarding this. I called

Shirpser: him immediately and told him what was going on. Both he and Bill Blair sent me good letters, which I gave to the press, making it clear that they had known nothing about Mitchell's action, and praising my conduct.

In fact, I had to get this statement from Adlai while he was in the hospital, recuperating from an operation. But he felt that it was so important that he wanted to get it on the record. And this paragraph, particularly, I've kept. I'm sure I have the whole letter someplace, but this one was the important paragraph.

"It seems to me that whether in the circumstances the individuals concerned should be candidates for Congress is completely a matter for them and their Democratic constituents in their districts to decide."

So, this really rebukes Mitchell. Bill Blair wrote that Paul Ziffren had called him a few days before the Mitchell letter and had said nothing about that letter.

I'm sure Adlai and Bill had read about it, because it was in the Washington Post and the New York Times and carried over AP and UP, so you couldn't very well miss it. It had national coverage.

During the campaign, later in the general campaign, when Estes was here helping to elect our candidates in '54, there was an editorial in "The Knave," which is the editorial page of the Oakland Tribune. They stated: "We can't tell what treatment is being accorded young Roosevelt because we don't have the schedule, but it's obvious that Condon is getting the official cold shoulder from the National Committee of his party. One of our reporters asked Senator Kefauver about the situation and the Tennessean replied that he was not going into that district nor taking part in the campaign, but he added hastily that there was no reason for him not going there if he had been invited, and this was not to be construed as a repudiation of Condon. Before the senator could be pressed further by other inquisitive newsmen he was saved by a quick assist from Mrs. Clara Shirpser, Democratic National Committeewoman, from Berkeley. Mrs. Shirpser explained that the tour had been planned in the order of precedence of requests for Senator Kefauver, and that there had been no requests from Condon's district at that time."

"Some of the more cynical newspapers thought it peculiar that of all the congressional candidates from the Oregon border to the Los Angeles County line, Condon seemed to be the only one

Shirpser: who hadn't put in a bid for some high brass assistance. Could it have been that he feared the rebuff from the Democratic national chairman?"

I think that editorial was not fair because I handled Estes' schedule, and I would have had some compunction about sending Estes there. But I would have put it up to him and asked him what he thought. We really did not receive a request until Estes' three-day schedule was so full that one more district simply could not be included.

Estes had courage. I don't think he would have ducked it. But I think that this is part of the picture of the way that Condon got defeated. That editorial exaggerated a situation that did not exist, as far as Estes' schedule was concerned.

Clara's Role in Revising Rules of Procedure for the National Committee Chairman

Shirpser: This National Committee meeting was scheduled, and I was armed with a large sheaf of letters, hundreds of them. All of them demanded censure of Mitchell. Some called for his resignation.

George Miller was leading the demand for censure. I think I did tell you that he praised me publicly for the stand I took, and spoke of how difficult it was for a member of the National Committee to take such a stand against the chairman.

Many members of the county committees, and the State Central Committee were outraged at the way Mitchell wrote only one California Democratic National Committee member, trying to deny the judgment of the voters in the district CDC conventions who chose Roosevelt and Condon.

I went to the National Committee meeting with some misgivings, but prepared to present the views of California voters, as evidenced by hundreds of letters I had with me. Of course, the press called me immediately, and I said that I could not divulge what I was going to say to the executive committee until I had appeared before them. It would not be fair to try this in the press, but I did repeat my stand.

Many National Committee members asked me to come and talk to them before the meeting. I came to Washington a whole day

Shirpser: earlier, because I wanted to have time to do whatever seemed the right thing to do. Everywhere I went I got support.

Every National Committee member with whom I talked said that if Mitchell had come into their state and had done a similar thing that they would have been just as resentful as I was as well as the Democrats who endorsed these two candidates.

Then, I received some amazing phone calls from some of the most prominent Southern United States senators, people with whom I formerly hadn't worked closely because of differing views on issues such as civil rights. Everyone praised me for my stand, saying that they supported me, and "Go to it, Clara! We'll back you!"

After I got over my first amazement I started thinking it through, and I came to the conclusion that it wasn't because they cared about Jimmy Roosevelt and Robert Condon, but states' rights were involved. One of the most prominent Southern senators said to me, "If Mitchell gets away with this, what's he going to do in my state next? You have got to stop him! This is a perfect time, and a perfect incident. He hasn't got a leg to stand on. You stop him! We'll all back you. We'll write speeches for you. We'll attend to publicity. We'll do anything you need. We want you to stop Mitchell!"

Chall: It wasn't only stopping Mitchell, but it was stopping some future action.

Shirpser: Oh, of course. They were afraid that if this went by without any rebuke to him, this might just give him the okay to go ahead and do whatever he pleased as an individual. Imagine the dreadful results which would then happen.

Chall: Not only Mitchell, but I'm thinking of anyone in the future...

Shirpser: Of course. There was a principle involved with national repercussions. But it isn't easy to go back there and buck the chairman.

Obviously, he had his supporters who were trying to stop me. Among them, Katie Louchheim.

Chall: Why?

Shirpser: India had resigned by then as head of the Democratic Women's Division, but she was at this National Committee meeting. She was still an officer of the Democratic National Committee.

India came to see me in my hotel room early in the morning before the executive committee meeting. She said, "Clara, I want to talk to you. I'll back you if you decide to ask for censure of Mitchell. But you'll never get a favorable vote in this executive committee. Behind the scenes they will criticize him but they will not come out publicly for censure. I think you'd be very wise to work out some sort of resolution that you want adopted that doesn't go as far as censure, but will clean up the situation because that's, after all, what you want, isn't it?"

I said, "You know how much I value your advice on strategy. You don't think there's any possibility of getting censure?" I showed her the sheaf of letters from party officials as well as club members. "You don't think there's any possibility with this kind of backing from my home state?"

India replied, "I doubt it very much. I think it would be much wiser to accomplish your objective by not using the word "censure" or "rebuke" or similar words."

I said, "All right. If that's your advice, I will follow it." The executive committee kept me waiting over an hour beyond the designated time. Of course, I was pacing the floor. This was an ordeal. I, alone, carried this big responsibility, because Ziffren had received the Mitchell letter and not gotten in touch with me. Paul Ziffren certainly was not liberal in this context, although he prides himself on his liberal ideas.

Just then, I was being paged so I went to the phone, and there was George Killion, calling me from New York. He had read in the New York Times that I had gone before the executive committee. He had been national treasurer and he was a close friend, and he wanted to know all the details.

I told him where I'd gone, what had happened, what India said, what Katie said. George Killion said, "I wish you'd call Oscar Chapman. In a situation like this, he's invaluable. I don't know a man who's as good on strategy as Oscar Chapman. He likes you. He'll want to give you the best possible advice."

I said, "Do I know him that well?" George said, "Of course you do. Tell him I suggested it if you want to do so. I really

Shirpser: would be guided by him if I were you, Clara. It may be that Katie is right. If you become so controversial it will be a battle between you and Mitchell and the issue becomes secondary. See what Oscar says, and then let me know."

So, I called Oscar Chapman, and fortunately, I reached him right away. We talked over this important decision at great length. Oscar said, "There is no doubt that Mitchell should be censured, but I don't think you will achieve that from this committee. It may be that it's developed into too personal a battle between you, representing California, and Mitchell representing the National Committee. Are there any other Democratic National Committee members who would make the resolution for you?"

I said, "There are many. I don't know who I would chose. Practically everyone I've spoken to approves what I am doing, and many have asked me to come speak to them in small groups. They want to stop this ever happening again."

Oscar said, "It's a shame that you shouldn't get the credit for doing this, because you have done it and carried the brunt of this matter. You were the only one to speak out, as I know, in the beginning. But, you've always put the objective you're working for ahead of your own interests. Are you willing to do this again?"

I said, "Surely, I would do it again." It seemed to be my fate to have this pattern repeated again. I did the hard, tough, work. I bore the brunt of all the arguments, and then when it came to the point where it was carried to fruition somebody else would do it.

But after all, if George Killion and Oscar Chapman thought so, if Katie thought so, and if I were really wrecking the whole meeting, and we continued fighting this through for hours, instead of going on to other business which we needed to accomplish, it might be best for all good reasons to let someone else make my resolution.

At the executive meeting, they gave me all the time I needed. I read quote after quote from many letters; from the state chairman, George Miller, from the State Executive Committee of the State Central Committee, from county chairmen not only in the two districts involved, from presidents of clubs. It was a most impressive array.

Shirpser: I read what they said. Steve Mitchell was squirming, red in the face, because this was really strong criticism. Names were called. You know, the McCarthy issue was brought up over and over again in these letters, such as "guilt by association." I read them the editorial from the Sacramento Bee, the Fresno Bee, and from other California and national newspapers. Many of them wrote these editorials criticizing Steve Mitchell.

I proposed two things, which I thought were important in this resolution. First, that no national chairman would again come into a state without consulting both National Committee members regardless of sex, before making any public statement involving candidates in any state (whether or not they had been endorsed by a pre-primary convention because all states did not have them. California did, which made our position even stronger).

Even if the National Committee members in the state agreed that it was a good statement, the national chairman should poll all of the executive committee members, and the officers of the Democratic National Committee. He could not speak individually when he was serving as national chairman. He had to speak in the name of the National Committee; he must get approval from a majority of the executive committee before he could make any such statement. Those were the two main things that needed to be said in this resolution.

I could see that I was getting a very favorable response from the executive committee, but I left before they voted.

We were talking about Katie Louchheim, who was national director of the Women's Division of the Democratic National Committee. This was later in the day after I had talked to the executive committee. I was on my way to the ladies' room and I had been talking with Doris Fleeson, national columnist, who was full of praise for me for my stand opposing Mitchell's tactics. She's very liberal and very outspoken. She said, "At last we have somebody in the National Committee who has guts. Anytime you need me..." She wrote an excellent column about what I'd done.

She saw me go in the ladies' room at the Mayflower Hotel, and she saw Katie follow me in there. Katie said to me, "Clara, you are wrecking this whole National Committee meeting. You will not get anything positive done. This whole thing is going to develop into a donnybrook which will tear the party apart. I plead with you to drop it."

Shirpsen: I said, "I can't drop it. I've already gone before the executive committee. I've already told them what I think must be done. I'm going to introduce a resolution during the National Committee meeting. My state wants me to do this--look at this large portfolio of letters."

She said, "Clara, you've become so controversial now. It isn't good for you. As your friend, I'm urging you to drop it."

I said, "Katie, I can't answer you now. I'll think about it. I value your advice. I know you're close to Steve Mitchell. I'm sure you are doing it at his request. (She didn't answer that, so, of course, it was obvious.) I've got to think this through. I've got to talk to some of the people who are working with me on this."

Then, later, when we went into the main National Committee meeting, the television cameras were there, as well as radio and the press representatives. It was a national incident. The lights and cameras were all trained on me, but I sat there and let other people do my work.

Monroe Sweetland from Oregon was in the forefront of this thing because he was one of those who were most antagonized by the Mitchell statement, and he wrote and phoned me. He had been on the committee quite a while, and he was well liked. So I met with him and several other members who were deeply interested, and I asked Monroe to make the motion in the National Committee meeting. We worked out the resolution among us.

I think the national committeeman from New Jersey, who was an important member, made a seconding speech.

The resolution was moved, seconded, and passed by a large majority. It became binding on the national chairman. This, probably, was one of the most important things I've accomplished in my whole career as Democratic National Committeewoman.

There's a quote here that I wanted to read: "Hell is paved with people who remain neutral in a moral crisis." I was pleased that I had not remained neutral.

Heavens knows, I did not remain neutral! Also I'll read you the quote from Harper's Magazine.* Marion Sanders wrote an article

*Marion K. Sanders, "Women in Politics," Harper's Magazine, August, 1955.

*Grandes Dames, Battle Axes,
Operators,
and Ardent Amateurs*



WOMEN IN POLITICS

By MARION K. SANDERS

Drawings by Charles E. Martin

AMERICAN women are feeling their political oats. The news has spread that there are two million more females than males of voting age in the United States. At most campaign headquarters last fall, women workers outnumbered men by two and even three to one. Their labors paid off spectacularly in many a skin-tight contest.

Politically speaking, we are in fighting trim. But our mood is not joyous. Indeed, from Phoenix to Binghamton, female partisans nurse elbows bashed and feelings bruised—not in honorable combat with the Republican or Democratic foe, but in the intra-party battle of the sexes. This useless guerrilla war is costing both parties a considerable treasure. It is hard to prove the much-advertised claim that women elected Ike; however, no one disputes that their efforts had much to do with his victory. Yet, at a White House political strategy conference on December 20, 1954, among those conspicuously absent were Bertha S. Adkins, Mary Pillsbury Lord, and the other heroines of the Eisenhower crusade. Columnist Doris Fleeason, a Democrat, called the omission a poor Christmas present for the girls. The sophisticated duenna of the Republican National Committee, Anne Wheaton—whose esteem for the President is matched only by her tolerance of male vagaries—observed that

"the incident has not passed unnoticed." More volatile ladies of both parties were just plain mad.

A month later, New York State Democrats feted their great at a Victory Dinner. On the vast dais, the fetching but lonely faces of Angela Parisi, ebullient State Vice Chairman, and Representative Edna Kelly were submerged in a three-tiered sea of black ties. This seemed a puny dividend to the ladies who had made a heavy investment of time and toil in Governor Hariman's slim margin.

This kind of thing is mortifying. It is like letting little Nancy make the canapés and then sending her off to bed when the grown-up company arrives. It is also puzzling. Why bite the hand that feeds the ballot box?

Some of the wounds, one suspects, are self-inflicted. The standard posture of female politicians is defensive. We plant one foot high above grubby practical politics and the other on a rock inscribed, "In our aspirations and capacities we are identical with men." No wonder our stance is wobbly. And no wonder the gentlemen are confused.

Are we, they ask, women first and Republicans and Democrats second? Are we part-time reformers or steady party hands? Why in the world do we want to get mixed up in politics anyhow?

Alas, there is no simple answer. Our faces may look familiar, but we are a diverse and mercurial lot. Learning to tell us apart is, I know, a great nuisance. He who troubles to do so, however, shall gain a pot of gold, that luscious prize—the women's vote.

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To be honest we must admit that Dolly Madison would have got nowhere without James. Mrs. Taft, too, had to have William Howard in tow when she struck the shrewd bargain with TR which is said to have landed her husband in the White House. And, in addition to brains and beauty, the diplomatic assets of Clare Boothe Luce include *Time*, *Life*, and *Fortune*.

THERE IS NOTHING GRANDER THAN A GRANDE DAME

GRANDES Dames are creatures like Eleanor Roosevelt, Alice Longworth, Perle Mesta, or Helen Gahagan Douglas, endowed with special gifts of wisdom, wit, opulence, or glamor. Ordinarily they are revered from afar by their own sex. (An exception is Mrs. Roosevelt, whom millions of women worship for her courage and integrity and have taken to their hearts because she has so much trouble with her children. Similarly, Helen Douglas enchanted her feminine followers, not merely by her valiant campaigning, but because, like everyone else, she had to put up her hair in bobby pins every night.) One of the oddest Grandes Dames of all time is Lady Astor who—though an MP herself—was and presumably still is a violent antisuffragette.

Since the specialty of Grandes Dames is the management of men, it would seem foolish to dally long in explaining them. They can take care of themselves. However, their political role needs definition.

For example, the august mien of Mrs. J. Borden Harriman, a Wilsonian Democrat, once persuaded a number of Scarsdale ladies that Republicans are not the only people who wear shoes. Last summer, a California Grande Dame performed a gallant rescue. During the primaries, Democratic National Committee Chairman Steve Mitchell repudiated candidates Roosevelt and Condon on moral and security grounds. National Committeewoman Clara Shirpsen, an exuberant Berkeley housewife, tartly told him to stay out of state affairs and to stop passing ammunition to local smear-artists. She gave her letter to the papers, and found herself in a deep freeze for breaching political etiquette. Ladies don't talk back to national chairmen. First to rally to her side was a San Francisco dowager.

"Clara, you're so right," said Mrs. Henry Grady—adding with queenly humility, "What can I do to help? I haven't got much brains but I've got lots of guts."



The atmosphere began to thaw. And in November Clara was vindicated. Jimmy Roosevelt won, having been handsomely supported by southern California women who consider him a charming man with an unhappy wife. On the other hand, the National Chairman's slap may well have been the *coup de*

grâce that retired Congressman Condon. >

In many parts of the world, the Grande Dame is the only type of woman who pulls any political weight. Foreign statesmen tend to ignore women who do not have mink coats, unless, like Eugenie Anderson, they learn Danish. Grandes Dames, therefore, make the best ambassadors.

This was impressed on me some years ago during a brief foreign mission of my own in Brazil, a country where women are just learning to vote and are seldom allowed to associate with men—except when doing the samba, a dance which has a leveling effect on the sexes, but not in a political sense. I was sent to Rio by the U. S. Department of State, which then employed me, to represent my division at a conclave of propaganda experts. For five sweltering days, the temperature and humidity maintained a steady 95. Business being finally concluded, most of us thought it would be nice, before winging home on *El Presidente*, to spend the final afternoon gazing at Sugar Loaf from cool Copacabana Beach. We sought leave to skip one item on the agenda, a mass call on the Brazilian Foreign Office.

Cheerfully dismissing the men in our party, the chairman seized my arm in a firm, if moist, grip.

"You must go," he said. "It is now known in Rio that there is one lady in this delegation. It is assumed that you are the mistress of the Secretary of State or you would never have been sent. The whole Foreign Office wants to look you over, and we cannot let our Good Neighbor down."

I have always felt that I owed Mr. Acheson, whom I have not had the pleasure of meeting, a personal apology for the wilted seersucker suit in which I trailed through those diplomatic

corridors. No Grande Dame would ever be caught unpressed at a time like this. I am glad that Mr. Dulles has sent to Montevideo Mrs. F. Peavy Heffelfinger, one of the stateliest oaks in our land. She has, I hope, repaired some of the damage which my visit inflicted on U. S. prestige south of the border.

Although splendid as exports, Grandes Dames are a trifle rich for American blood and, at home, should be reserved, like champagne, for special occasions. Mr. Bernard L. Lamb was, no doubt, carried away by the majestic hats in his audience when he exhorted the Federation of Republican Women's Clubs not to hold all their parties "at the country club."



"Meet the woman on the other side of the tracks," he said, "with her five dirty-faced children."

Now, in plain truth, a weakness for country clubs, salted almonds, and silver tea urns is a bipartisan foible. Such trappings have switched the enrollment of many a suburban housewife. But this is society-page stuff. Mr. Lamb, unfortunately, hit the news columns. This was in September 1953. Shortly thereafter, the country and a number of Democrats were stunned when Republican Congressional strongholds started toppling.

Grandes Dames are not tactical weapons and generally make poor candidates. Bipartisan cheers rang in Los Angeles last summer when brilliant, soignée Mildred Younger beat backward-looking State Senator Tenney in the primary. Rather listlessly, and with minimal hopes, the Democrats put up a young lawyer named Dick Richards to oppose her. He won. A candid Republican lady explained the outcome this way:

"Mildred made wonderful speeches but she didn't really campaign. I don't think you can really campaign in a Mr. John hat."

THE GREAT BATTLE AXES

I AM NOT a militant," said Daisy Harman in 1918, after viewing a rowdy suffrage demonstration. She was quite right. Although a dedicated suffragette, and a power in Washington and Oslo, she is a Grande Dame. The militants of the suffrage movement and their lineal descendants are today's Great Battle Axes. Burning with a pure white flame, they are the stern and prickly Conscience of the Party.

"Are you a lawyer?" one asked me suspiciously when we first met. "I can't work with lawyers. They always want something."

We became friends only when I proved that politics is, for me, the road to bankruptcy.

"Women's interest cannot be aroused in mere partisan strife," wrote a *fin-de-siècle* Great Battle Axe. "Their interest centers around questions affecting education, public cleanliness, public morality, civic beauty, charities, correction, public libraries, and such subjects as more intimately affect home life and conduce to the prosperity of the family. Men understand that, in legislative matters, when they oppose one woman they are opposing practically all women."

This was good bait for luring timid ladies to the polls. But it did not help political relations between the sexes. Men have been understandably leery of colleagues more bent on shampooing public morality than on winning elections. This is probably why Dorothy (No Sin) Lee is now on the Federal Parole Board after one aseptic term as Mayor of Portland.

The Great Battle Axes are our rough riders. They will storm any citadel for a principle and, above all, for the principle that woman's place is in the political sun. Not long ago, an Ohio Great Battle Axe abandoned her law practice and her husband and scurried to Texas where, she had learned, a woman running for Congress was being dumped by the men. It made no difference whether she was competent or not. She was a woman and that was enough.

Last summer valiant India Edwards flew to California and manned the stockades for a woman who was slated to become Democratic State Chairman. This feminist milestone had resulted chiefly from the strange laws of succession established to prevent civil war between the

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northern and southern portions of that curious state, but India expected the boys to pull a fast one—which, of course, they did. Mud flew in the ensuing Donnybrook. Its target, Liz Snyder, is a seasoned campaigner and finally won out. India was very pleased. But when I last saw her, Liz looked more tired than triumphant. To head the Democratic party of California is like riding a two-headed horse with blind staggers.

THE LESSER BATTLE AXES

TIME seems to have dampened the flaming hostility toward men which stoked the engines of the Great Battle Axes. In any event, their successors, the Lesser Battle Axes, have learned to handle their aggressions more deftly. Products of the post-feminist era, many have been schooled in the art of competing with men in business and the professions. The League of Women Voters has produced some first-rate Lesser Battle Axes and so have the PTAs. The American Association of University Women nurtured CIO-PAC's Esther Murray, and Edna Jamison (who has been called Senator Kefauver's secret weapon) is a Tennessee Sunday School teacher. Most women leaders of local political organizations are Lesser Battle Axes. I am one myself.

We are, in general, married and blessed with supremely co-operative husbands—cheerful meeters of planes, warmers-up of stew, and payers of giant phone bills. These indispensable men are usually attached to the same political parties as their wives. I know of only one exception and this poor fellow now takes a Gibson before breakfast. Says Dr. Louise Young of American University:

"The husband of a woman in politics has to be mature."

A plaintive response to this tribute was made by Walter Louchheim, whose wife, Katie, runs the distaff side of the Democratic National Committee.

"Is it absolutely necessary," he asked, "for a mature man to have holes in his socks?"

Few husbands will go as far as Arthur N. Green, who is moving his electrical-heating business to Washington while his wife Edith represents Oregon's Third Congressional District. Perhaps most callings are less mobile than electrical heating. But since the election of a married woman to state or national office usually involves uprooting or forfeiting a valued male,

there is a chronic shortage of good female candidates.

There are other reasons too for this state of affairs which can't be laughed off. I know, for I've tried. My own plunge into political waters occurred in 1952. I dove, or rather bellywhopped, in by running for Congress in a district which has been a one-party fastness since the Civil War. I upset no precedents but I had a marvelous time. Part of the fun was slugging it out with my opponent, Katharine St. George. She is, obviously, a woman, but there any resemblance between us ends. For several weeks she followed the common practice of incumbents who are sitting pretty. She pretended no one was running against her. This gave me a brief monopoly of the local headlines. Word was then leaked from her headquarters that a *shocking disclosure* about me would shortly be unveiled. My strategists, determined not to be caught flat-footed when the blow fell, forced me to engage in Proustian remembrances of my peripatetic past. This was a grueling ordeal. Finally, they pinpointed *that night in Bratislava* as the softest spot.

Recently, I bumped into Claiborne Pell, who was our Vice Consul in Slovakia at the time, and he recalled the episode with gusto. However, my opponent never found out about it, so I am certainly not going to tell the story now. I assure you there was absolutely *nothing* to it, but I don't want it thrown in my teeth when I run for coroner. What she did discover was that I once edited a U. S. government magazine that was sold in the Soviet Union.

"The Russians," she said darkly, "must have liked it."

Since this exploit was featured in my campaign biography and had been praised by such diverse organs as *Time*, the *Washington Star*, and the *Wilkes-Barre Record*, it caused more of a splatter than a smear. I released a scathing reply. My county chairman, Mike Prendergast, an Irishman with a low boiling point, emitted a blast. This livened up an otherwise sedate campaign.

Much of it was conducted in split-level ranch houses where my followers exposed their neighbors to my magnetic presence. After one such gathering a dear little old lady bade me a warm farewell.

"I enjoyed your talk," she said. "Of course, I won't vote for you; but I won't be mad if you win."

This turned out to be the prevailing sentiment. It was not, however, because of the dearth

of constituents that I declined the party's designation in '54. We have picked up a lot of votes lately and politics is my true love. I am the happiest of party hacks. But as a candidate, I feel inadequate. Chiefly, I lack the priceless asset of a man running for office, that built-in housekeeper, secretary, chauffeur, and campaign manager—a wife. During my one bid for office, these burdens were borne by my young and heroic daughter. But she has since been hired by a politician who has a habit of winning. My



husband is a prince about jungles of pamphlets and queer characters in the living room, warmed-over coffee, unmade beds, and forgotten children. He puts up with these by-products of wifely campaigning, but he does not relish them.

I have found, too, that soothing the furrowed brow of your favorite candidate is less debilitating than working the saloon and church-social circuit yourself. This discovery has also been made by Maurine Neuberger, who has quit the Oregon legislature to be a full-time U. S. Senator's wife. Her decision would have irked Carrie Chapman Catt, but it does not surprise me at all.

LESSER battle axes take a cautious view on the question of women in public office. We pray, of course, that the Lord will one day send us another Margaret Chase Smith. This would be a boon even to the Lone Goddess of the Upper Chamber whose impact is somewhat diluted by a perpetual bath of cloying Senatorial courtesy. Hopeful eyes are upon Consuelo North Bailey, an ornament to the Republican party and to the State of Vermont, which has made her Lieutenant Governor. On the other hand, we note, too, that Wanda Sankary of San Diego produced a baby the day after she was elected to the state legislature. This was dramatic, but really quite inconvenient. So is the whole busi-

ness of running for office if you happen to be a woman. We can take it or leave it alone.

However, we are all far from gentle on the question of An Equal Voice Within the Party. Recently, a Midwestern Lysistrata enforced a women's boycott of state headquarters when she found that all the hot questions of strategy, candidates, and patronage were being settled at stag sessions. The boycott lasted two months. After a truce was signed, the ladies rolled up their sleeves, helped elect a governor, and sent a woman to Congress for good measure.

MINNIE O'GOLDFARB

THERE is no use in whining about the things perpetrated in the 130 blissful years when men had politics all to themselves. It was natural for them to grab off all the good jobs and try to entail them for their male heirs. But what a rough time they have given us since 1920!

Take, for instance, the whole tribe of Minnie O'Goldfarbs. These are the girls they dredged up from somewhere (without, of course, talking to any of the women in their organizations) when the party rules were changed and co-chairladies, committeewomen, and such had to be appointed. Sometimes Minnie is Good Old Joe's widow and buys a table for The Dinner every year. Sometimes she is that woman down the block whose whole family votes right. Her cardinal trait is that she cannot distinguish a petition from an issue. Also, she was frightened in infancy by a man with a big cigar and still quivers in his presence. Like her blood-brother, the old-style political henchman, she expects to be paid off, in cash or a seat on the dais, for her lumpish efforts in behalf of the party.

Her memory is ever with me when I read those vast compilations of Women in Public Office and Party Posts that turn up seasonally. I simply take my customary Minnie O'Goldfarb discount of 50 per cent. For she is still cluttering up half the available spots.

Just as a mother may neglect her healthy children to pamper the family idiot, male politicians tend to ignore viable women workers while lavishing the tenderest care on Minnie. An extreme instance of such behavior occurred during my campaign for Congress. One of the several County Chairmen who controlled my destiny welcomed me to his fief with the blithe news that he was concentrating on the women's vote this

year. He was, in fact, running a woman for local office and we could, perhaps, blend our girlish campaign efforts. He turned to a shadowy figure cowering in the rear of the Court House, where our conference was taking place.

"Here she is!" he said, proudly.

"What are you running for?" I asked.

The shadow peered inquiringly at her master, over steel-rimmed glasses. She shuffled her feet, drawing my eyes to the inch of slip that had outdistanced the hem of what I insist was a Mother Hubbard. She said nothing.

"It don't matter what she's running for," said the County Chairman. "She's a woman and she's on the ticket. You two can really go places in this campaign."

Since Minnies live forever and never resign, they present a vexing organizational problem. They are not only dead wood but permanent stoppers in the few party openings that could be filled by capable women who deserve recognition. An astute Republican state vice-chairman is experimenting with a novel solution on the theory that if they can't be eliminated perhaps they can be housebroken. Last year she started holding women's caucuses before State Central Committee meetings.

"Those girls were stunned," she told me. "I guess it was the first time they'd ever sat in a meeting without some man at their elbows telling them how to vote. I held them in line 100 per cent. Of course, I don't know if the boys will let them come to my caucus next year."

THE OPERATORS

MINNIE should not be confused with the sleek siren at the chairman's right when the TV camera pans over the convention rostrum. Glossy as these lilies are, they spin and many a plum has been trapped in their webs. These are the Operators. Since their calling places them on frequent public display they must, like movie stars, spend a great deal of time in beauty parlors. They make good use of the hours so gained for solitary meditation. It is possible, also, that prolonged cooking of the scalp under dryers sharpens the wits, as heat tempers steel. Their footwork, too, is admirable. This is vital to survival in the big time where these girls play.

Most Operators are the machine-tooled products of entrenched machines and wear rhinestone-studded brass knuckles. They need them,

for bosses are rough on intruders, irrespective of sex, who might want a hunk of the patronage pie. The Operator cannot concern herself much with others of her kind. Maintaining her own toe-hold is a full-time job. Occasionally the Operator attains high office. Since a good Operator can out-maneuver the craftiest bureaucrat, this is often in the public interest. Sometimes, however, she is miscast. For, unlike most politically active females, the Operator is not, temperamentally, a Do-Good-er. Take Mrs. Oveta Culp Hobby. She is, of course, not a Do-Bad-er. But except for an interlude in the WAC, when she associated mainly with generals, she has eschewed the Worthy Women's world. She could perhaps have done an even better job in the Commerce Department than as head of what Herblock has dubbed the Department of Not-Too-Much Health, Education, and Welfare.

THE ARDENT AMATEURS

IN OCTOBER 1954, Mildred Breidenstein, who runs a grocery, persuaded eighty-four ladies to stage political television parties in Isabella County, Michigan. Around the same time in Manhattan, Audrey Hess was stuffing a thousand envelopes. Zoë Wilson, whose husband is head of the Amalgamated Meatcutters, AFL, and Helen Stoll, a Portland lawyer's wife, saw to it that 80,000 phone calls were made in Multnomah County, Oregon, on and before election day. And in Nyack, New York, a former Iowa beauty queen, Connie Voss, who weighs ninety-six pounds, toted a davenport twice her size to her party's headquarters.

These are the Ardent Amateurs. They are wonderful and they abound. Usually they work as part of a regular campaign organization. There is so much to do during campaigns that no one cares if you are a man, a woman, or a chipmunk. But after November, the Ardent Amateur who wants to stay in politics is in trouble. There are, of course, no vacancies in the regular organization. So she ventures to a meeting of the town's "mixed" political club. Here she makes a painful discovery. She is afraid to speak up, lest she make a fool of herself in front of all those men. This is precisely what she does when she scrambles nervously to her feet.

Why is this? The Ardent Amateur is bright and her education is the same as her husband's. Unfortunately, she has not had the same post-

graduate course. While he was learning to hold his own in office, factory, union, business, or professional organization, she was home. During the years when babies were ever under foot, she even got out of the habit of reading the newspapers carefully.

At this stage our Ardent Amateur is no match for men in matters parliamentary and political. The "mixed" club might make her chairman of the social committee but this is not really very different from being a Grade Mother. Probably, she joins the League of Women Voters, which has a program sensibly geared to the capacity, pace, and leisure of the intelligent housewife. Because our political parties seldom offer similar opportunities, many Ardent Amateurs linger indefinitely in the safe, non-partisan womb of the League.

In Democratic circles, well-organized women's programs are a rarity. The Federation of Republican Women's Clubs, on the other hand, has roots in forty-five states; the GOP has the money to finance such grand-scale operations, and, with the '56 campaign right around the corner, is moving them into high gear through a series of lavishly publicized regional conferences. The Federation itself, however, is not dependent on such seasonal support. For the past sixteen years, it has flowed on, like the mighty Mississippi, unchecked by National Committee snubs or Democratic jibes. It may look stuffy to the untutored eye, but its hand reaches far beyond the tea table. It is no accident that the Utah Federation president, Hazel T. Chase, has been re-elected to her third term as Salt Lake City's county recorder.

ATOMS AND OLEO

WHILE many women can serve useful internships in their own divisions or clubs, they should move on, as soon as possible, into real life. In crossing the frontier, we must also jettison some prevailing stereotypes about women's political sphere.

Breezy Coya Knutson of Minnesota stepped bravely out of character last fall by being elected to Congress not because she is a woman but because, like her constituents, she is a farmer. She then went on to demand and get a place on the all-male House Agriculture Committee.

This is subversive stuff and was so noted in the political sections of the *New York Times*. Lady politicians more commonly land on the woman's

page when, like Representative Leonor Sullivan of Missouri, they bemoan the high price of coffee. Maurine Neuberger also spent a lot of time urging the Oregon legislature to give working mothers a tax break on baby-sitters and wielding a greasy mixing spoon in behalf of colored margarine. Senator Neuberger described these feats in his book, *Adventures in Politics*.

"In politics," he wrote, with an almost audible sigh of masculine relief, "the woman's mission is to champion the particular aspirations of her sex."

Now, I hate paying a dollar-twenty for coffee; I love yellow oleo; and I wish we could have taken a deduction for all the money we paid to baby-tenders when I was a working mother. I grant, too, that such matters make good political chit-chat at Den Mothers' meetings. But does Maurine really consider these the limits of her political mission? If so (and this may be a small price to pay for so nice a husband as Senator Neuberger) let her speak for herself. I won't buy it unless I have to.



Often, I confess, I do. Last summer, for instance, I served on my party's state platform committee. The gentlemen, who enjoyed their customary plurality on the committee, allowed me to draft the planks on Juvenile Delinquency, Mental Health, Senior Citizens, and Retarded Children. These are women's topics. I was also encouraged to play around with Migratory Farm Labor because I come from a rural area, twenty miles north of the city line, and our urban male brains were preoccupied with such grave matters as legalized Bingo.

Now, I happen to know practically nothing about the topics listed above. However, there are lots of people around who do. It was an instructive and simple task to reduce their ideas to politically palatable paragraphs. I enjoyed

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doing it. When I had completed my ministrations to the afflicted, my thoughts returned to a field in which I have a mild competence, foreign affairs. This is because I spent eight arduous years engaged in little else. (I am also quite a whiz on Subaqueous Tunneling, Marine Borers, and Free Lighterage, but these are poor vote-getters.) Accordingly, I offered to join the group that was composing our foreign policy preamble. This suggestion evoked the kind of fish-eye I would expect if I tried to become Chief of the Rescue Hook and Ladder of Haverstraw. I had stepped out of woman's sphere and I was properly slapped down.

I do not begrudge the American male the tranquil enjoyment of the locker-room palship which means so much to him. If ever elected to anything, I will gladly sponsor a bill forever enjoining women from becoming Volunteer Firemen, attending American Legion Conventions, or playing pool. But I decline to humor the boys by limiting the political scope of women to whatever topics men, at the moment, find boring. This is not feasible unless we confine the curricula of our women's colleges to home economics and sociology.

During most of my own campaign I stayed prudently on the reservation, at the urging of seasoned counselors. Friendly reporters also thirsted for "woman's angle" copy, preferably double-distilled since this was a two-woman race. Price control, middle-income housing, and other housewifely topics were not the burning issues of 1952, so most of my speeches were pretty dull.

IN LATE October, I shed this spiritual hobble skirt. The emancipation took place in a Delaware County, New York, hamlet which is a two-hundred-mile drive from my home in Rockland County. A minor blizzard started in mid-afternoon and slowed our travels, as did stops in transit at the taverns, post offices, and feed stores which are the chief rendezvous of Democrats in the area. As a result, we arrived around eleven at night, three hours late.

Delaware is a county chiefly populated by cows and Republicans. The site of this rally was a summer hotel and a very nice one. On that bleak night, however, it resembled the catacombs and the brave little band in the restaurant looked like early Christians awaiting the Second Coming. Their eager welcome, at this unseemly hour, was due to the fact that I was appearing not merely as a Candidate (who can get by with

a few graceful remarks about the Other Candidate), but as the Speaker of the Evening. This is a tough assignment, even when well fed. A Great Oration is expected. Inspired by the twenty expectant faces before me and emboldened by the lateness of both the hour and the campaign, I decided—the hell with the woman's angle. What would Adlai Stevenson do at a time like this? And so I sailed into the great issue of our times, the issue of war and peace in the atomic age.

It must have been midnight when I finished. The chairman arose and shook my hand.

"Fellow Democrats," he said, "I must confess I wasn't anxious to come out on a night like this to listen to some housewife. But our candidate is better than Lowell Thomas."

Then, turning to a waiter, he bestowed the final accolade of acceptance in the masculine society of the twenty-eighth Congressional District of New York.

"George," he said, "bring this lady a Seven-Up and apple jack."

WHY AND WHITHER

IT IS TIME that we stopped behaving like Iolanthe's little band. Much energy has been wasted tripping hither, tripping thither at the behest of obtuse men and peculiar women. Whither do we want to go and why?

For an answer, we could, of course, poll our celebrities. But the air they breathe is somewhat rarefied. Let us, instead, caucus among ourselves. To this end, I have gathered together a group well-regarded by their own sex and their respective parties, although they enjoy only local fame. They range in magnitude from district co-leader to national committeewomen. They will speak for themselves:

Janet Tourtellotte (R) of Seattle, Washington: When women got the vote, men expected to yield 50 per cent of their political authority but we failed to claim it. When we finally tried to get into the smoke-filled rooms, they assigned us minor roles as workers but not as strategists. We should function in separate organizations while progressing toward equal responsibility in all party activities.

Ethel Longstreet (D) of Beverly Hills, California: We will support candidates who talk to us convincingly about the real issues, not those who patronize us with feeble jokes. We don't want to be every-other-year workers but part of a going organization.

Katherine S. Dixon (R) of Lake Forest, Illinois: Women are less compromising than men on most issues. We can encourage people of high calibre to run for office when we can offer them strong organizational backing. People who jump from party to party to vote for a personality are in no position to offer real support.

Belle Mayer Zeck (D) of Suffern, New York: Women constitute the largest labor pool available to our political parties. However, this potential will never be realized unless their talents and skills are fully utilized and unless they are permitted, after the election is over, to participate in their parties' leadership.

Marjorie H. E. Benedict (R) of Berkeley, California: The great majority of women do not seek personal rewards for their political efforts. Their unselfish work as volunteers is extremely effective. But we must have a full voice in policy-making.

Marjorie L. Schneider (D) of Galesburg, Illinois: Any attempt to limit us to menial tasks shows poor judgment and is grounds for a revolution. Women must infiltrate into the regular party ranks.

The sense of this meeting seems clear. We don't desire a matriarchal chain of command but we do want a chance to advance the ideas and the candidates we cherish. We accept party discipline but we expect the party to give us our due. And we dislike being treated as second-class politicians.

Is our position unreasonable? Now hear Herb Waters, the deft manager of Senator Hubert H. Humphrey's last campaign.

"Women," says Herb, "can be extremely effective, if they are given an opportunity to plan and guide their own participation, rather than just being 'used.'"

This simple precept governed the "Minnesota Women for Humphrey" committee. Its chairman was not the customary absentee name-on-the-letterhead, but an able, diligent, and charming worker, Eleanor Moen, who had her own ideas on how to pursue the women's vote. Herb told her to get going. Senator Humphrey, a man of modest means but strong convictions, set the ladies up in business with a personal contribution, thus obviating the humiliating mendicancy which is the lot of most women's committees.

From that point on, "Women for Humphrey" paid its own way, chiefly through small change dropped into campaign sugar bowls in countless kitchens and antique sugar bowls displayed

at meetings and fairs. A series of promotional teas was held to enlist potential leaders. Ultimately more than two thousand active workers set off a chain reaction of coffee parties.

Pink was the campaign color (although not the political complexion) of "Women for Humphrey." Letterheads were pink and so were the cobbler's aprons worn by women workers, the leaflets, flyers, and even the campaign phonograph record of which 5,000 were distributed. Although pink is a shade many women like, it was seldom worn by Susan B. Anthony. Her spirits would soar, however, as mine did, upon hearing that foreign policy was the favorite Kaffee Klatch discussion topic.

"Women for Humphrey" did not operate in an ivory nunnery. Mrs. Moen was a full partner on the campaign strategy board, along with the heads of the Mayors', Veterans', Businessmen's, Lawyers', Students', and Physicians' Committees and party regulars. When the votes were counted, Senator Humphrey had a plurality of 162,000 in a state Eisenhower carried by 150,000 in 1952.

The Minnesota story is refreshing, and other hopeful winds are also stirring. Late in January, after all the fuss about those White House stag dinners, the President got up at dawn to meet with some eminent Republican ladies. The gathering was called a "Doe Breakfast." This event took me back to my bloomer-and-middy-b blouse days. One glorious morning, I remember, the coach of the boys' basketball team came all the way over to the girls' gym to deliver a pep talk. It gave us a real charge.



Shirpsers: in Harper's Magazine called "Women in Politics." This had national coverage and it was written in a rather amusing way.

She heads this paragraph, "There is Nothing Grander Than a Grande Dame. Grande Dames are creatures like Eleanor Roosevelt, Alice Longworth, Pearl Mesta, and Helen Gahagan Douglas, endowed with special gifts of wisdom, wit, opulence, or glamour." (I was very proud to have her list me in that classification.) "Last summer, a California Grande Dame performed a gallant rescue. During the primaries Democratic National Committee Chairman, Steve Mitchell, repudiated candidates Roosevelt and Condon on moral and security grounds. National committeewoman, Clara Shirpsers, an exuberant Berkeley housewife, tartly told him to stay out of state affairs and to stop passing ammunition to state and local smear-artists. She gave her letter to the papers and found herself in a deep freeze for breaching political etiquette. Ladies don't talk back to national chairmen. First to rally to her side was a San Francisco dowager"--and close friend--

"Clara, you're so right," said Mrs. Henry Grady." She had been a former Democratic National Committeewoman, and vice-chairman of the Democratic National Committee, and she had seconded Franklin Delano Roosevelt's nomination. Henry Grady, her husband, had had many diplomatic posts as ambassador. Lucretia's support of me meant a great deal. She was one of my dearest, most beloved friends.

To go on with the article, Lucretia said, "'What can I do to help? I haven't got much brains, but I've got lots of guts.'" I hasten to add that she had lots of brains, too! "The atmosphere began to thaw. In November Clara was vindicated. Jimmy Roosevelt won, having been handsomely supported by Southern California women who consider him a charming man with a very unhappy wife. On the other hand, the national chairman's slap may well have been the coup de grace that retired Congressman Condon."

Later Marion Sanders wrote a book, too, on women in politics.* She included this incident with more material about me.

Chall: I haven't seen that.

Shirpsers: I have the book if you'd like to see it.

Chall: I would like to.

*Marion K. Sanders, The Lady and the Vote (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956).

Shirpser: This came to me completely unsolicited. Mrs. Sanders hadn't even interviewed me when the Harper's article was published, beyond a telephone call.

Chall: Well, she certainly had the facts.

Shirpser: Yes. And it meant a lot to me to get that kind of accolade from a person like her.

These are letters regarding Condon. This one was written to Ziffren with a carbon copy to me from James B. Kenny, chairman of the Democratic Central Committee of Contra Costa County. This was something I hadn't mentioned before. "In view of this act of extremely poor judgment and the vilification of Robert Condon, and in view of the fact that Mr. Mitchell did not see fit to change his view in time to help Mr. Condon, we feel that he should no longer continue in his high office of the Democratic party. We feel further that his last minute wire to Mr. Condon which extended his best wishes, and wishes for good luck, coming at the time it did, was an act of hypocrisy, not of good faith."

"The news of his wire hit the press on election day, and therefore, was completely ineffective as far as Robert Condon's race was concerned. In any consideration concerning Mr. Mitchell's future with the Democratic party we sincerely trust that you will give our views much consideration."

That's about as strong a statement as you can make, isn't it?

Also, "Cappy" Ricks [C.A.] who had been a Kefauver delegate wrote, "Bob Condon was given a very dirty deal by National Chairman Mitchell..."

Chall: I wanted to go back to something I don't think we had discussed with respect to Mitchell. This goes back to 1953 at, I think, a Chicago conference, a mid-term meeting in Chicago, on September 12, 13, and 14, 1953.

There was a maneuver then, apparently, to oust Mitchell, as chairman. There had been a press release indicating that you and Ford were really, either behind it, or planning to vote to oust Mitchell. And that also created a great controversy in the area. My impression is that whoever issued that press release had simply lied out of whole cloth. Is that possible--that people can do that?

Shirpser: A reporter whom I knew well and whom I called to ask how that got into the paper said that it was planted by a high state Democratic official.

Chall: Whom you thought was Miller?

Shirpser: I can't say--I don't know. I don't accuse people unless I have the facts. But, neither John Anson Ford nor I had any intention of asking Mitchell to resign. At that point, we were working together fairly well.

John and I called the press and issued a strong press release saying that this was not true, that we had no such intention. I sent this clipping to Steve Mitchell, and I got a nice letter from him thanking me for trying to clear this up, and saying that "you cannot come out ahead in the press. If they want to say something which someone has planted and not name the person who did it, this was their right." He thanked me for my statement saying that I had no such intention, nor did John Anson Ford.

That's why it was so fine to work with a man like John Anson Ford. We trusted each other, had confidence in each other. We thought along the same lines. Nothing like that Mitchell letter to Ziffren would have been possible if John Anson Ford had been national committeeman. Nothing ever happened in our association that wasn't mutually amiable; we didn't quarrel. We understood each other's point of view, and we accepted each other's point of view. We did our best to convince each other, but if not, we each did what we thought was right.

It was such a wonderful relationship. As national committee-woman, my former relationship with John Anson Ford made it more difficult than ever to suffer from Ziffren's unjust treatment of me.

That National Committee meeting ended with good feeling. Many people thanked me and praised me for what I'd done, and realized what I had done; even the Southern Senators.

In fact, I made a note to myself. I realized the wisdom of the adage, "Politics makes strange bedfellows." Because here we were in complete harmony about what we thought of the conduct of the national chairman, and yet, we opposed each other on issues.

This relationship was helpful later, when my next resolution came up, which is a separate chapter.

Chall: This National Committee meeting took place when? Sometime before the November election?

Shirpser: It was in 1954, before the general election.

Chall: And, actually, Mitchell had, in fact, only a few more months to remain in office as national chairman.

Shirpser: From what I heard later from a couple of members of the executive committee, who are good friends of mine, he was very soundly called down and told that he could never speak as an individual, when he was chairman; he could only speak in the name of the Democratic National Committee. He should have realized that, and as an attorney he should have realized that the national chairman of the National Committee cannot support one candidate against another in the primary according to the by-laws. What he said was wrong and the way he did it was wrong.

Chall: Well, of course, he was in a sense repudiated by the man who was responsible for putting him into that office, and that would be Adlai Stevenson.

Shirpser: That's right. Adlai Stevenson's letter plainly opposed Mitchell's stand.

Chall: And he hadn't even consulted with him apparently.

Shirpser: No. Adlai knew nothing about it until I wrote to him. That was why it was so wonderful to have this close relationship with Adlai and Bill Blair, because I always could reach them. If Adlai were in Libertyville, if he were traveling, wherever he was, the minute I'd say who it was calling him they'd find him and put him on. This was immeasurably helpful to me.

The 1954 Election Campaign in California

Shirpser: Perhaps we ought to talk a little about what happened in '54, the general campaign. One of the first people to come out was Estes, of course. You know, he was truly popular in California; his energy was indefatigable. He was willing to campaign for congressional candidates in California.

Shirpser: appalled. That wouldn't do us any good! For instance, the candidates for Fresno want to get on at Modesto, and get off the plane with Estes in Fresno to be photographed together, and en route they wanted to discuss the issues with Estes.

I said, "Estes is coming out here with a secretary, and by the time I'm on the plane and you're on the plane, and a couple of candidates, there won't be room for the pilot!" He said, "Well, I don't know what else you can do."

I said, "I don't, either. I'm in despair." So, I thought, "Who would know what to do? George Killion!" So, I called George, and told him of this crisis: Estes is getting here in two days. I should not take him up in a one-motor plane. It's a terrible risk, flying low over orchards. It's just not fair to him. What am I going to do? And the plane Roger got for us is entirely too small, seating only four people."

Chall: It's funny when you look back on it.

Shirpser: Yes. George Killion said, "Call Ed Pauley." I said, "I don't know Ed Pauley." He said, "He knows you. He knows you're the Democratic National Committeewoman. I've spoken to him often about the great work you're doing. You can tell him I said to call him. He has a beautiful, large plane. I think it's called Twin Lodestar plane, with two motors. It has a pilot and a navigator. It has a couch where Estes can lie down during flights. It seats about fifteen or sixteen people."

I said, "He won't let me have that plane." George said, "He will. Call him."

So, I called him. Fortunately, I reached Mr. Pauley right away, and explained the situation. He said, "Yes, I know Senator Kefauver well. I would be delighted to give you my plane and to be of help to you, too."

I said, "What will it cost me, Mr. Pauley?" He said, "It won't cost you anything! Of course, it won't cost you anything! You'll only have to pay the expense of the pilot and the navigator staying overnight, and their meals. How long do you want it?"

I said, hesitantly, "Three days and nights." He said, "Of course. The pilot and navigator will get their instructions from you. You tell them where you want to go, and how long you want to stay. You are in charge of the flights. The only trouble is, the plane is in Mexico City. When do you need it?"

Shirpser: I said, "The day after tomorrow?" He said, "I can get it back in time. Where do you want it?" I said, "San Francisco Airport?" He said, "Fine."

He told me how and where to find the pilots, the number of the plane and the location where they would be landing this private plane. I pinched myself! I couldn't believe that anything as wonderful as this could happen to me!

I called George Killion and he said, "You don't realize what being national committeewoman means. All you had to do was phone him and tell him your problem. He was glad to help you, wasn't he?"

I said, "Yes, but it always seemed 'pushy' if I asked for something like this." He said, "Never hesitate."

We met the plane in San Francisco, and we found it a very luxurious and comfortable plane, and we took our tour in great style. We covered a large amount of territory. Estes said, "How in the world did you get this wonderful plane?" When I explained to him, he wrote to Ed Pauley and thanked him.

The pilot and the navigator couldn't have been nicer. We found there was a built in bar, stacked with fine liquors, and "fixings," and hors d'oeuvres. I never had such luxury in my life, with this beautiful plane at our disposal.

But, we had one bad incident, which was most painful to me. A candidate for Congress was running in the San Luis Obispo area. So, we set up one of Estes' meetings there, to help his campaign.

He joined us earlier in Monterey, and rode with us to San Luis Obispo where the meeting was to be held. I noticed that he was drinking a great deal, but I thought that he knew what he was doing, and that he could handle it.

We came to the dinner, and we sat at the head table. Liz Snyder had come up from Southern California where she was women's chairman, to be with us. This man looked like he had a good chance of winning, and all of us were anxious to help him. While the dinner was being served this candidate turned to me-- he was sitting two seats away--and he said in a loud sneering voice that could be heard all over the room, "What the hell did you do for Ed Pauley, Clara, to get that plane today?"

Shirpser: I said, "I don't know what you mean. All I did was ask him to lend us his plane for campaigning." "Well, it seems to me you're going to have to give him something or other, and I hate to think what it is, in order to compensate for his giving you that plane."

Then he turned to Liz Snyder and said, "I don't need you here, either!" At the top of his voice!

I had worked so hard on all of this. This was the second or third day of exhausting campaigning. Here we have this man--I won't say what I want to call him--on the plane, drinking Ed Pauley's free liquor, coming in with Estes at the airport in his home area, being met by the press, shaking hands with Estes, and this whole dinner was in his honor, as well as in honor of the local state senate and assembly candidates, and then talking to me in this offensive, bullying way!

I left the table, not wanting to make a scene. Liz followed me, and Estes followed her. And I ran to the ladies' room. I didn't want to talk to anybody. I was almost in hysterics.

So, Estes couldn't follow me into the ladies' room, obviously. But Liz did, and Liz is tough. She could take these things far better than I could. She tried to comfort me, and spoke contemptuously of "our candidate's" conduct.

I never had anyone speak to me like that in all my life! It was completely undeserved, too.

Chall: This was in the banquet room?

Shirpser: In the banquet room, he was yelling at me at the top of his voice! People within fifty feet of him could hear every word! You know what he was implying, obviously.

Really, I could hardly bear it. Later, I heard that Estes took him aside and talked to him in the sternest way that anybody ever heard Estes speak. At the end, he said: "This won't do you any good. I'm cutting a lot out of my speech. I will speak on issues, but I will not give you the warm endorsement I intended to. Any man that conducts himself as you do is not the type of candidate I want to endorse."

This man lost the election. His whole district was outraged--he was intoxicated in public and he disrupted his own dinner. Later, Estes, after we got back to our hotel, came and talked to

Shirpser: me. You know, Estes was a gentle and considerate person, and he was deeply disturbed that I had taken this terrible and unjust denunciation.

If this man hadn't come on the plane and drunk too much, he undoubtedly would never had said that to me.

Chall: Did he ever apologize?

Shirpser: No, I don't think so. I never heard from him again. He's back under that rock he crawled out from under, I guess.

Stuart Symington Campaigns for Sam Yorty

Shirpser: Then, Senator Stuart Symington came to California to campaign. I've always had a fine relationship with Stuart Symington and I think so highly of him. When I was once in Washington, he asked me to have lunch in the Senate dining room. I was waiting for him at the entrance. He was a little late. Estes came along. He started talking to me and he said, "Are you waiting for someone?" I said, "Yes, Stuart Symington has asked me to lunch."

So, Stu came along just then. Estes said, "May I join you?" Stu said, "No, you can't. You see enough of Clara. I'm going to have her all to myself today." I said, "Good heavens! Having the two handsomest, most famous senators in the United States fighting about me! I'll never forget this lunch!"

This was the sort of camaraderie you had with your senators when they were out here, and you've traveled with them and worked with them. It led to wonderful relationships when you went to Washington.

I found some letters from Stu, planning his tour here. He went to Southern California, too, but I didn't go with him. I stayed in Northern California because we were in the midst of our campaign then.

Subject to his approval of these plans, I arranged a press conference at the Press Club in San Francisco. They asked him to stay for a lunch meeting, where I, too, was invited. When you speak there they put that statue of a little black cat out on the head table, that famous black cat which was sculptured by

Shirpser: Benny Bufano.

When that's out, everything said is off the record. The Press Club members are absolutely trustworthy in their meetings when the black cat is on the speaker's table. If the speaker is willing to be quoted for part of his speech, they remove it, and if part of it is off the record, back goes the black cat.

If anyone ever broke that pledge they would be asked to resign from the Press Club.

Chall: Who holds the black cat? The speaker?

Shirpser: The chairman of the meeting. He consults with the speaker ahead of time. Stu is very humorous in speaking, and he made a good impression. Of course, he spoke for our Democratic candidates. I don't remember whether it was on the record or off the record or partly both.

Then, we had a private fund-raising cocktail party. I knew that Ed Heller was a good friend of Stu's. Stu was interested in Sam Yorty's campaign. He had known Sam when they were both congressmen.

So, Stu was here chiefly to speak for Sam Yorty. I asked Ed Heller and Rex Nicholson to be co-chairman. I worked hard in getting this cocktail party together and getting people invited who would contribute to Yorty's campaign, the people we call our "fat cats." The party was well attended.

Stu spoke to them. He knew many of them. We did do a good job of fund raising at this cocktail party. Then, the schedule called for a dinner meeting in Marin County.

Some of the Marin County officials came over to get Stu, to drive him over there from the Fairmont Hotel. I was in his suite with Ad when they phoned and said they were coming up to call for him. He turned to me and said, "Clara, may I ride over there with you and Ad?"

I said, "Not unless you want me to have my throat cut. We'd be delighted to drive you back, because they all live in Marin County. They would resent it if you did not ride over with them. If you suggested it, they would think I put you up to it."

At the dinner meeting, Stu spoke very well. There was excellent press coverage for Sam Yorty, of course. Sam was with

Shirpser: us at the Press Club luncheon, too.

I remember a funny incident that happened at the dinner. (They always asked me to speak at all of these meetings. After all, I had arranged for their speaker.) I said, looking at Sam, "You know, Sam, when you come into the U.S. Senate for the first time after you are elected, and you are inaugurated there, I'm going to be sitting in the gallery and I'm going to be proud of you." He said, "Fine, we have a date."

Later when Stu spoke he said, "I'm very, very annoyed with Clara Shirpser today." I thought, "What have I done!"

He said, "I've been with Clara since early morning; she met me at the airport. We've done everything together all day long, with one meeting after another. We came to this meeting and she spoke and said some very nice things about me. But when she comes to the United States Senate, who is she going to be proud of, and who is she going to be watching? Not me. Sam Yorty!" [Laughs]

You know, he picked this up so quickly. He made a much better story of it than I'm telling. These little incidents are amusing.

Incidentally, I arranged many women's meetings in various parts of the state during the campaigns. I gave a reception for Elizabeth Snyder in Berkeley at Helen Monscharsh's home, which is a beautiful, large home with lovely gardens. Alice Hostetler came, who was president of the Democratic National Women's Club in Washington, D.C. She is very attractive and a good speaker. She stayed at our home, and we became good friends. I always saw her when I went to Washington, later.

Chall: And these women's meetings were with women speakers?

Shirpser: Yes, we usually had women speakers; I would travel with them. I drove them from one area to another, and, of course, introduced them. India was most valuable during these campaigns.

Adlai Stevenson at the Hollywood Bowl

Shirpser: Adlai was here about that time. I mustn't forget Adlai. I never want to forget Adlai. He came to Southern California first. He came to Los Angeles for an enormous rally in the Hollywood Bowl. All of the state officers flew down from Northern California as well as those from Southern California.

There was a dinner meeting honoring Adlai in a building adjacent to the Hollywood Bowl. We could always get a good crowd together for him. This was a \$100-a-plate, including the rally.

The rally tickets cost about \$1 general admission, and \$5 for reserved seats. About 20,000 people were there. Adlai was to make a top level television address from the Hollywood Bowl.

Prior to the dinner, which we set at an early hour so we could get to the Hollywood Bowl on time, there was a cocktail party. That's where people came to meet Adlai and to visit with him. Well, he didn't arrive, and people were getting restless. I got on the phone and he hadn't left, but I was told that he was coming immediately. We were all "on pins and needles."

Paul Ziffren called Adlai. Liz Snyder called Adlai. You know what he was doing? He was revising his speech. We had to sit down to dinner and he still hadn't come. Many people there were angry. You know, everybody wanted to talk to him.

Finally Adlai walked in and came to his place at the head table. I was sitting next to him, and Paul Ziffren was on the other side. Adlai got up and said a few gracious words about a last-minute emergency that he couldn't avoid, and that he was looking forward to seeing them after the rally.

Then Adlai sat down and he started to eat. The salad, probably, was in front of him. People began coming up to talk to him while he was eating his dinner.

Well, he's a gentleman. He kept getting to his feet and shaking hands, then sitting down again, trying to eat. In the meantime, his dinner was getting cold. He finally turned to me and he said, "Clara, I cannot go on tonight unless I have a few minutes of relaxation and privacy to get my thoughts in

Shirpser: order. I will not speak to one more person until after the rally."

I said, "How can I stop them?" He said, "I'm depending on you to stand in back of me and to say to anyone who comes up that I must eat my dinner in peace, and I must get to that rally in condition to make a good speech."

Well, you can imagine the hostility that I incurred by doing this. I stood behind his chair, arms outspread, and I said, in effect, "I'm sorry, but Adlai's exhausted. He was working on his speech until the last minute because of an unforeseen crisis. He must have some time to eat his dinner. If you'll wait until after the rally he said to tell all of you to come on the stage and he would talk to everyone then. But, he cannot do it now. Please believe me. I'm not doing this on my own. It's for his good and the party's good. You'll have to accept it."

I kept making a similar speech to everyone, but many people became angry with me. I was kind of glad, really, that Adlai turned to me instead of to Paul. Because, normally, I think that you would ask a man to do that. Adlai knew that I would understand and that I would manage it somehow, and I did.

He made a magnificent speech at the rally. It really was great. It was one of the best speeches I've ever heard him make.

After everybody came up and talked with him after the rally, I rode back with Adlai and Bill Blair to the hotel. I remember saying, "That was a magnificent speech. I was inspired by what you said."

He said, "Clara, you always tell me that. It wasn't a good speech. I didn't say what I intended to say. I didn't end in time for TV coverage. It was one of the worst speeches I've ever made." I said, "You wait and see what the press is going to say about it."

Of course, the press gave him great praise and fine coverage. But this was just a sample of Adlai's personality. He never did as well as he wanted to do. He never thought that he'd accomplished what he should.

Chall: I want to ask you a question about the statement that you made that many people wanted to come up and talk to him at the dinner.

Chall: Who are these people who feel it so important for themselves that they would interrupt a man's dinner? Why would they even think of doing it, and why would they be upset that they were asked to wait?

Shirpser: Well, it's a broad cross section of people. They come to a dinner and buy a ticket for \$100, and they are big contributors to other people's campaigns, too. Adlai was full of prestige in their eyes, and I think they wanted to go away and say, "I shook hands with Adlai Stevenson," and to quote what he said to them.

Chall: It's as simple as that.

Shirpser: It's a symbol, seemingly, to people who feel they've earned that right if they're generous with their contributions. This has been a pattern. We've always had this reception or cocktail party prior to the \$100-a-plate dinner. That's where they can walk up to the candidate and shake hands and speak to him, and then quote him.

Many letters were written to Adlai expressing their admiration. I can't tell you how many people all over the state would carry Adlai's reply with them and show it to me. I knew which secretary in his office had learned to sign "Adlai Stevenson" as Adlai wrote it in his own handwriting. I could tell the difference because I had so many letters from him which Adlai did sign. After all, the signature was "Adlai Stevenson." "To think that I have a letter that Adlai signed personally," people would tell me, joyfully.

I never told anyone differently. Sometimes when they were just swamped with letters and Adlai was away, they didn't want to wait too long to answer. After all, the purpose of it was accomplished.

Chall: Think of all the people who will be, perhaps, peddling letters with Adlai Stevenson's signature on it and they will be frauds.

Shirpser: Well, if they think it's his then it is his. Do you think that it really makes that much difference?

Mixed Results at the Polls

Shirpser: We have not discussed the result of the elections in 1954. While both Dick Graves and Sam Yorty lost the general elections by substantial majorities, I had been hopeful that Sam might make it because he was a congressman and he had campaigned very hard. But the clubs, though they endorsed him, were not really for him. George Miller was opposed to him, and Bert Coffey was opposed to him, and I think that this influenced many club members.

I don't think they did much for him. I tried my best to help him. Dick Graves' defeat was a foregone conclusion. A man can't be a Republican until four days before he announces that he's going to be a candidate for governor on the Democratic ticket. It was one of the worst campaigns that we've ever had.

But we did very well at the congressional level. The Clubs demonstrated that they could, in their districts, develop enough support. We elected [two] new state senators, and [seven] new state assemblymen.

One of the reasons was that, for the first time, we had the party designation after the candidate's names. We didn't abolish cross-filing completely, but we did get the party designation after the name of the candidate. This showed that when Democrats knew who the Democrat candidates were, they would vote for them, if they were good candidates.

We received much praise from Washington, from Cap Harding, the chairman of the Congressional Campaign Committee, and from Steve Mitchell, and from many other friends. All were delighted with what California had done.

The next time I came back to a National Committee meeting, I was asked to speak to the National Committee and tell them how we'd done it. Senator John Sparkman wrote me a fine letter. He was here on a visit, which wasn't particularly a political visit, but he let me know he was coming and Ad and I took him to cocktails and dinner, and drove him to the airport, and we had a good visit.

I told John Sparkman about the clubs, and he said in his letter that ever since he got back to Washington he was telling what was happening in California, the enthusiastic response,

Shirpser: and how well we did in '54, and urging other states to get going to get their states organized. So, it was good that he was here and recognized what we were doing and saw the value of it.

The Election of State Party Officials

Chall: I want to ask you about the election in 1954, and the State Central Committee.

When Liz Snyder was elected chairman, apparently she wasn't the unanimous choice of the members of this Democratic State Central Committee in that election.

Shirpser: There was a very vicious campaign against her. India Edwards came out from Washington to help her, and I did my best, too. I went to Southern California every time I had an opportunity, and in Northern California, too, I spoke for her.

Liz was so forthright in answering the rumors that she got a standing ovation, and she won as state chairman of the Democratic party. Part of the opposition to her was undoubtedly because there had never been a woman as state chairman in California. She proved to be an excellent state chairman. Liz had some conflicts with the CDC; she thought they did not have enough official status and that they were taking over some of the official party's prerogatives. She was the first woman who ever won the state chairmanship. That was another "strike" against her.

Chall: Who was her opponent, do you recall?

Shirpser: No, I don't. I'm sure it was a man. [Laughs]

Chall: Now, let's see. At the same time Clinton McKinnon became the Southern California chairman. And Roger Kent came in as the chairman for Northern California.

Now, my sources indicate that Jack Tolan wanted to be chairman in Northern California, and that Don Bradley, Pierre Salinger, and George Miller supported Kent.

Shirpser: I tried to help Jack. It was evident during that convention that the congressmen should spend more time at home. Because Jack was nominated by Congressman Clair Engle, I think. Or maybe it was Congressman John Moss because it was in Sacramento, and then maybe Clair Engle seconded it.

But, two of our best and most prominent congressmen spoke for Jack Tolan. Jack Tolan's father had been a congressman from my congressional district, and Jack had been his administrative assistant in Washington, D.C. He had many friends and contacts in Washington. He was well experienced in politics, one of the best-grounded people I ever knew, and extremely capable.

As Northern California chairman he would have done an excellent job. Jack was one of my closest friends. I took him around to all the caucuses and introduced him, and spoke for him. It wasn't much help. The congressmen who endorsed him so heartily, they were ineffective, too.

Afterwards, when we talked it over, we all agreed that congressmen ought to spend more time in their home districts if they wanted to have any influence with the State Central Committee convention. I think, in the future that they did.

In the past, few of them came to the state convention. So, when they did come they were so far away from these people that they didn't know them well, and the convention didn't pay much attention to them, frankly.

Jack was a good sport. He made a speech of withdrawal. One of the things said about him, which was most unfair and which hurt him most was stated by a prominent Negro, who said-- I'm not sure that he said that Jack was anti-Negro, but he certainly implied that Jack had never been strong in civil rights and had never supported Negro causes.

This was untrue because Jack had developed, in Richmond, with Barrett Corporation, a whole series of duplexes. Ad and I bought one and then, later, we bought a second one. One of the reasons we did it was because Jack said, "You always said you were for civil rights and that you're for integration. Prove it. We have a project here with no restrictions. I have a Negro tenant on one side of the duplex and a Caucasian tenant on the other side, and no problems. The children play together happily. They go to the same school."

Shirpser: Later, Jack's project was chosen by a national survey as the outstanding example of integration of any housing project in the United States. Here Jack Tolan was pioneering in this field of housing at a time when it was very unpopular. And he was accused by a black of being anti-Negro in that State Central Committee Convention. Naturally that rumor spread, and influenced people against Jack.

It hurt Jack terribly. He felt badly about it.

Chall: Who was it who accused him?

Shirpser: I'd rather not say. I know who it was but I don't believe I should say. Because, later, I'm sure he realized he was wrong. But, this certainly hurt Jack at the convention.

Chall: Were there many Negroes in the convention? Or would it have been white liberals who would have been opposed to him on those grounds?

Shirpser: Well, you see, the State Central Committee is composed of all sections of the Democratic party. It depends--I think I mentioned before. Every nominee of the party and every incumbent appoint their own--two of the opposite sex, and one of their sex.

Chall: But, how many would have appointed Negroes at that time?

Shirpser: I think it depended on what the district was, and what support they had. There certainly were some Negroes, but not as many as there should have been.

I only had the opportunity once; at that time I did not appoint a black. None had been very active in supporting me, and I did have three appointees to whom I was grateful, who had given me great help in my campaign, and who were excellently qualified, too.

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